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OLD!

RETRO* GAMER

VOLUME TWO ISSUE TWO

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No.1 For Classic Gaming

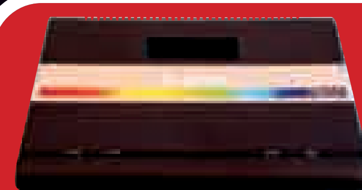
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RETRO* GAMER



Atari 7800

The console, the games, the legacy



Ritman Report

Head over Heels creator talks



Super Spectrum

Gaming greats on the Speccy 128



Street Fighter II

The Arcade Legends return

RETRO GAMER*

V2 02

eMag

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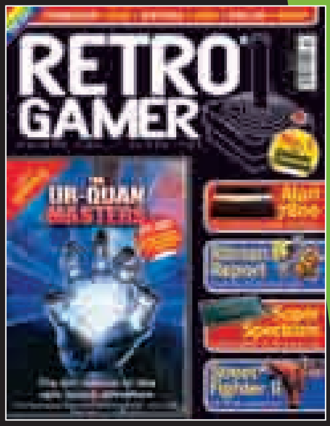
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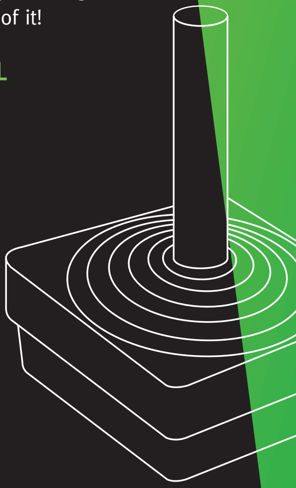
hello

Welcome to Volume Two Issue Two (#14 in old money). I'd like to start by saying thanks for all the feedback relating to the changes we've made to the magazine. It's safe to say that the new look and content have gone down very well indeed, and that all the hard work has finally paid off. For me, the best thing about Volume Two is that the magazine is now absolutely packed. We've still got the same amount of pages but there's so much more content.

This got me thinking – exactly how much more content is there in this issue compared to issue 12 (which was the last one before the redesign)? It's a bit sad I know, but I added up the number of words in issue 12 and the number of words in the issue you're holding in your hands. The results were surprising (and now I know why my hair has been rapidly greying over the last two months). There were roughly 41,000 words in issue 12, and over 59,000 words in this issue. That's a 31% increase, and yet the pagination is the same! In fact, that could be a great cover line: "*Retro Gamer*, now with an extra 30% more retro content!"

Right, that's me done for another issue. Enjoy the magazine – all 59,000 words of it!

MARTYN CARROLL
EDITOR



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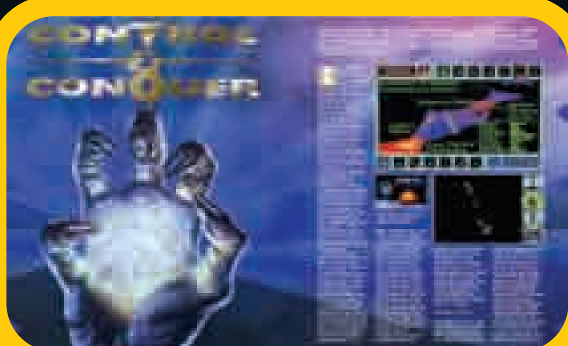
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EPISODE II
LUCASARTS STRIKES BACK


RETRO PASSION


CONTROL & CONQUER

<Regulars

More Midway gold

Third Arcade Treasures collection revealed

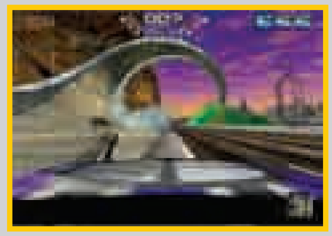
Following its success with the previous two Arcade Treasures packs, Midway is currently in the process of developing a third collection of retro-themed riches. Unsurprisingly entitled Midway Arcade Treasures 3, the compilation is due out later in the year.

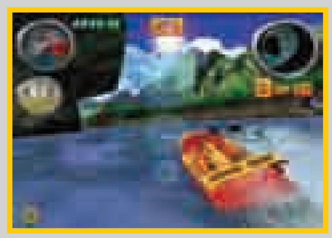
Rather than another random assortment of titles, this third pack focuses on man's love of all things fast and furious. It will include Midway's classic racing titles, bringing eight rubber-burning greats to today's consoles. The selection of games has been announced and the full line-up is: Badlands, Hydro Thunder, Off Road Thunder, San Francisco Rush 2049, San Francisco Rush The Rock: Alcatraz Edition, STUN Runner, Super Off Road and the Hard Drivin' sequel, Race Drivin'. Although there are fewer games than in the previous packs (which featured more than 20 each), arcade driving fans should certainly be happy as every type of racer is represented, from 3D speeders like San Francisco Rush and Hydro Thunder, to top-down multiplayer games like Badlands and Super Off Road. The Xbox version will also include Live support so you can post and boast about your high scores.

Midway Arcade Treasures is due out in the autumn, and will retail for around £20 on PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube.









Capcom legends

The vaults are being raided again



News of a new console release has been floating around the Internet of late. Nothing is known about the content of the game, which goes by the name of Capcom Classics Collection, and Capcom itself is keeping quiet. We do know that Capcom plans to release a number of volumes in the series, which will each be themed in some way. But details of exactly what games will be revived are still top secret.

It's a fair bet Street Fighter II will make it into the collection, but depending on how far back the company goes, the rest of the contents could be very interesting indeed. Will the original Resident Evil make it into the mix? Or will Capcom go truly old skool and wheel out classics like Black Tiger, 1942, Ghosts 'n' Goblins and Bionic Commando? An announcement is expected at this year's E3 in May.



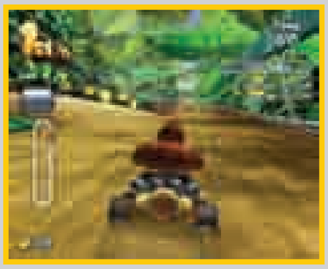
Important happenings in the wonderful retro world

Coin-op Mario Kart

Arcade GP races into town



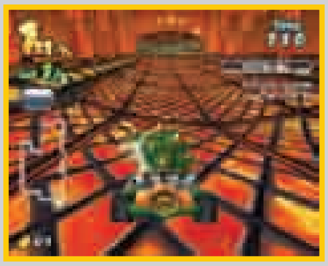
Nintendo's cutesy racer Mario Kart is perhaps one of the finest multiplayer games ever devised, and like all great games, clones have sprung up all over the place, none of which have been able to steal the original's crown. Now the go-karting legend is back, but not on the GameCube, the GBA, or even the DS. In fact, Mario will soon be found ripping around your nearest arcade.





The new game, which is a collaborative effort from Nintendo, Sega and Namco, is currently titled Mario Kart: Arcade GP. The game itself was recently revealed at the AOU Games Show in Tokyo, where it was easily the main attraction with hour-long queues forming, despite the fact that it was only 50% complete.

The unit is a full-on arcade racer, complete with sit-down cabinets, connected to other units Daytona-style, and it's claimed that that it will eventually support up to eight players. A nice touch is the presence of Namco star Pac-Man, which bodes well for Namco and Nintendo's future plans. Namco reps revealed that the final game will boast 24 courses, six worlds and a special card system that will contain race- and kart-modification data. Even more impressive is the fact that the game runs on enhanced GameCube hardware. Here's hoping that a home version will follow in its tracks…



Sonic RIP?

New survey sparks rumours of rodent's death

Sega's big wigs are obviously brainstorming because the gaming giant has posted a survey relating to all things Sonic on its US site. The survey, which asks about people's favourite characters and suggests possible new game titles, can be found at **www.sega.com/survey/sonic2005/sonic_poll.php** and anyone is welcome to fill it in.

This would suggest that Sega is planning to revive the Sonic franchise in the very near future, following the huge success of Sonic Mega Collection Plus on PS2 and Xbox last month. But a new game featuring Sonic himself is strangely missing from the roster, and the only games hinted at include titles starring Tails, Knuckles, Shadow and Dr Robotnik (Eggman). Is this the death knell for our beloved blue rodent? We'll have to wait and see…



Xbox Is Doomed

Original FPS classics resurrected

No, Microsoft hasn't gone bankrupt. In fact, id's Doom III is finally heading to the Xbox, bringing the huge PC hit to the console world with a bang.

Doom III is already a great (and downright scary) game, but it's the new additions that we're getting overexcited about. It's been revealed that Doom III on the Xbox will ship with both Doom and Doom II included in the game. And that's not all, because both classic FPS titles will be compatible with Xbox Live. Classic Doom deathmatches online through consoles? Surely it's the future!



Shine on

The force is strong

The epic sequel-spawning Sega RPG Shining Force, is about to make its debut on the PS2 with Shining Force Neo. Unlike its predecessors though, Neo will be a whole new kettle of +2 flaming broadswords, ditching the usual top-down 2D for a Zelda-esque 3D environment and real-time combat.

Not a move that's gone down too well with hardcore Shining Force fans, as many believe this new game will be Shining Force in name only. We must admit that the chess-like quality of the original was the RPG's best feature, and we're surprised to see Sega drop this from the game. We'll have to wait and see whether this sequel has what it takes to follow in the series' success when it arrives later this year.

Radica gets menacing

Another month, another batch of TV games



If you just can't get enough of the new wave of TV-based games currently flooding the market, then you're in luck as Radica is set to release two more Megadrive devices, adding to its already impressive list. The two new gadgets aren't simple game pads like the previous Arcade Legends, but will be totally unique creations.

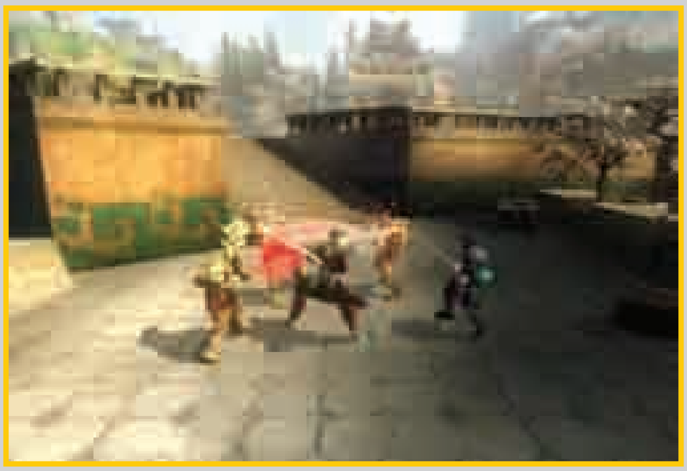
First up is Radica's revival of the Menacer, the Megadrive/ Genesis light gun. This will come with the original six pack of games that shipped with the controller when it was first released. These titles are: Pest Control, Rockman's Zone, Space Station Defender, Whack Ball, Front Line and Ready, Aim, Tomatoes with Toejam and Earl. The gun itself looks the business, although it's clearly based on the Sega Saturn's light gun, rather than the original Menacer.

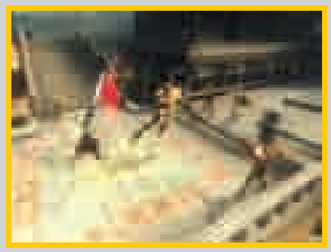
The second new gadget is an odd one, and brings back the rather lacklustre OutRun 2019, the sci-fi-fuelled sequel to the racing classic. The game may not be all that impressive, but the controller Radica has created certainly is. The device incorporates the usual controls, along with an actual steering wheel, so you can play just as would in the arcades. We can't understand why the Megadrive versions of OutRun and Turbo OutRun haven't been included though.

Both devices are to be released in autumn and are expected to retail at around £24.99.

Throwing down the Gauntlet

The dungeon masters return





The daddy of all co-op games, Gauntlet, is set to return to our screens and is being headed up by none other than John Romero. Romero, who worked on the all-time greats Doom and Quake, will team up with Josh Sawyer, of Icewind Dale fame.

The new game, Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows, won't be a simple remake of the original though, because the team is working on a brand new action adventure that should bring the squad-based dungeon crawler to a new generation of fans. You take on the role of four warriors who previously accepted a quest to slay an evil emperor. They failed and were crucified on a big ol' tree (like you do). Luckily, they managed to escape and have vowed to finish their mission.

"Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows captures the nostalgia of the legendary franchise, and delivers the darkest, most intense Gauntlet saga ever," claims Midway's Matt Booty. We're told that the game will capture the essence of the arcade original, but will also add some RPG elements to the mix. There's also going to be a new 'junction' system, although at the moment, we're not entirely sure what it's all about. But we do know that up to four players will be able to hack and slash their way through the game, so look out for Gauntlet's return on Xbox, PS2 and PC later this year.

eMag

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

In this issue, we take you back 20 years to March 1985. With the Easter hols approaching, a glut of great software appeared, while in the background the computer price wars raged on. We also said a sunny hello to a new monthly C64 magazine going by the name of *Zzap!64*

February's computer price war, instigated by Acorn and Sinclair, continued as yet more machines were drawn into the price-reduction merry-go-round. As Commodore had already sliced the price of its Plus/4 system to £150, high street retailers decided to lower the cost of other machines to fall in line with the emerging price structure. The Commodore 64 was also reduced to £150 and the cost of the Commodore 16 was lowered to just £70. The lowly Plus/4 started to look like the black sheep of the Commodore family and a trip to the slaughter house seemed imminent.



The future looked grim for the Commodore Plus/4, while production of the Jupiter Ace wound up

Acorn and Sinclair experienced a spot of good luck after their reduction of the Electron and Spectrum Plus to £129, as a huge increase in demand sent sales figures on a significant upward trend. This was good news for home computer manufacturing, which was most definitely in the doldrums.

Another computer that was affected by the price war was the Jupiter Ace. Having been left behind in the computing race with virtually no software support whatsoever and a very small user base, the machine's producer decided to sell the remaining stock off at the bargain bucket price of just £35 (compare that to what it fetches on eBay nowadays, retro hoarders!). Boldfield Computing, which had taken over from Jupiter Cantab almost a year previously, reiterated that this wasn't definitely the end of the road for the micro, saying it could certainly produce more if the demand was there. It wasn't and Boldfield never manufactured another Ace.

The final price reduction of March 1985 came from the mighty Mattel. It decided to lower the cost of all its Aquarius software to £3.50. That seems a bargain price, but when you consider that the entire software range for the computer could probably fit inside a shoebox (and a small one at that), it's hard to see why anyone would even think of owning an Aquarius in the first place.

Whilst many companies were trimming back prices to stave off competition and attract new users, Amstrad was going from strength to strength. The CPC464 was voted Computer of the Year by the Computer Traders Association and was also flourishing financially having posted record profits for the previous six months. And with the anticipated launch of the CPC664 just a matter of weeks away, things were looking very good for Amstrad.

Games galore

Ultimate, the software enigma, confirmed that two of its top-selling Spectrum games would be converted to the Commodore 64. Both Sabre Wulf and Underwurlde were C64 bound, with budget specialist Firebird carrying out the conversions. Amstrad owners also experienced a toasty feeling when Ultimate confirmed rumours that it would be converting several of its old Spectrum releases to the CPC.

The charity game Soft Aid, the proceeds of which went go to the Ethiopian Famine Relief, was quickly realised and released, although not without a slight disagreement along the way. The inlay art for the compilation, featuring an Ethiopian mother and child sitting in a desolate wasteland, was queried by WHSmith. It wanted confirmation that the profits from the sale of the compilation would be going to the Famine Relief Fund and said it would not entertain the idea of selling the title unless this was stated on the front of the cassette box. A sticker for the cassette box





The closure of *Big K* was somewhat sweetened by the arrival of *Zzap!64*

was quickly produced and Soft Aid went on general sale in mid-March at £4.99.

Level 9, undisputed king of adventuring, revealed that it was releasing all its old games on the MSX computer range. This would be a welcome injection of gaming excellence for the system, which had so far failed to impress on the software front. Level 9 also revealed plans to release adventures based on the Adrian Mole diaries by Sue Townsend, although these wouldn't be available until later in the year.

A&F Software, producer of the ovoid masterpiece Chuckie Egg, announced that it would be making a sequel to its best-selling game of the previous year. Entitled Chuckie Egg 2: Choccy Egg, the game would receive a timely Easter release.

Mag max

The magazine scene was also fairly hectic around March. After saying farewell to *Personal Computer Games* and hello to new magazine *Computer Gamer* in February, the industry would also see a departure and a new in arrival in March.

Amstrad Computer User decided to go monthly after three bi-monthly issues, showing the increase of interest in the CPC market. This was only the second issue that could be obtained through newsagents, as previous issues were just available through annual membership to the official Amstrad Users Club.

There was also wonderful news from Newsfield, the publisher of *Crash*, as it revealed it would be branching out with the introduction of a sister magazine for the Commodore 64. It would be called *Zzap!64* and would be produced in a similar vein to *Crash*. The first issue would be available in the very near future...

Unfortunately, the industry had to say a very sad goodbye to another great multi-format magazine. After just 12 issues, *Big K* was axed by IPC Magazines. Ironically, the final issue included one of its best-ever features – a four-in-one interview with some of the all-time great programmers, including such exulted names as Matthew Smith, Tony Crowther and Jeff Minter. They were all gathered into one room and spoke about the state of the software industry and their software in general. A superb magazine and a real shame it didn't last longer.

And that was March 1985.

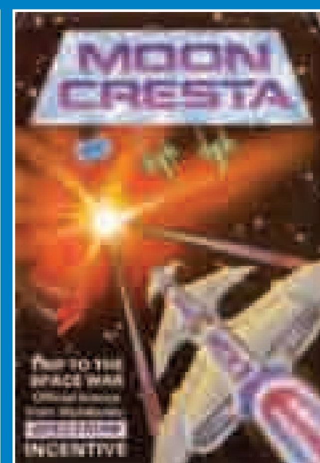
›Games watch

March also produced a splendid crop of new games, starting with Dragontorc, Steve Turner's marvellous sequel to his earlier hit Avalon. The Python-inspired Brian Bloodaxe from The Edge was also welcomed into the gaming world.

Computer and Video Games **magazine featured reviews of two absolute all-time Spectrum classics – Skool Daze (Microsphere – see overleaf) and 3D Starstrike (Realtime Software). Both games scored fantastic ratings, 9/10 and 10/10 respectively, and are still firm favourites 20 years later. Elsewhere,** ***Crash*** **magazine reviewed Gyron (Firebird), Moon Cresta (Incentive) and the superb Atic Atac clone, Wizard's Lair (Bubble Bus). All three gained well-deserved** ***Crash*** **Smash accolades.**

Other noteworthy releases in March 85 included the newly converted Tir Na Nog (Gargoyle Games) for the Commodore 64, Booga-Boo and The Snowman (both Quicksilva) for the MSX, The Hobbit (Melbourne House) for the Amstrad and Commodore 64, Sir Lancelot (Melbourne House) for the Amstrad, and Wriggler (Romantic Robot) for the Spectrum. Finally, Mikro-Gen's Everyone's A Wally, previewed at February's LET Show, became available for the Spectrum.





›Top Five Charts (March 1985)

Commodore 64

1. Chiller (Mastertronic)
2. Booty (Firebird)
3. BMX Racers (Mastertronic)
4. Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Ocean)
5. Ghostbusters (Activision)

Spectrum

1. Booty (Firebird)
2. Technician Ted (Hewson Consultants)
3. Alien 8 (Ultimate)
4. Ghostbusters (Activision)
5. Airwolf (Elite)

BBC Micro

1. Football Manager (Addictive Games)
2. Castle Quest (Micropower)
3. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
4. Jetpac (Ultimate)
5. Scrabble (Leisure Genius)

Dragon 32

1. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
2. Hunchback (Ocean)
3. Chuckie Egg (A&F Software)
4. Dragon Chess (Oasis)
5. Frogger (Microdeal)

Game of the Month

Please be upstanding, including you kids at the back, for Microsphere's Skool Daze

Kids love games. Kids hate school. Put them together and you've got Skool Daze, Microsphere's memorable skool-em-up, which lets kids run riot at a state comprehensive without getting the cane (or, if you're a child of the 80s, a stern talking to).

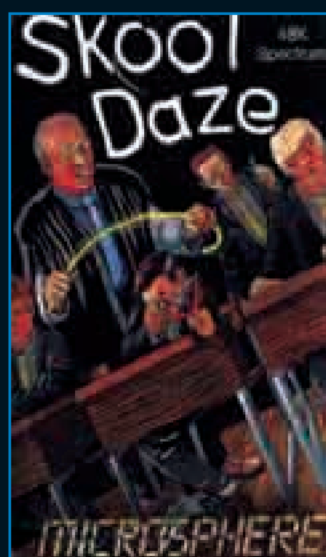
Playing as Eric, a young ruffian who's probably now in prison, the aim of the game is to steal your school report from the staffroom safe. You see, the dreaded parents' evening is looming, and since you've spent more of the year smoking in the lav than studying in lessons, you need to swap the damning report for a glowing appraisal before the headmaster claps eyes on it. Finding the safe's combination is quite convoluted, and involves hitting all of the school shields, thereby making them flash and disorientating the teachers. If you then knock one of the teachers over with your catapult they'll blurt out one of the digits. Get all four digits from each of the teachers and you can unlock the safe and complete the game.

It's certainly a tough challenge, especially as the teachers dish out lines if you're even the slightest bit unruly (and 10,000 lines results in immediate expulsion). But then, Skool Daze isn't about completing the task in hand. No, it's more about bunking off science, punching wimps in the face and scrawling words like "bum water" on the blackboard. That's right – finishing the game takes second place to raising hell. A genius touch in the game is that you can change the names of both the teachers and fellow pupils. After a bit of rubber-key prodding this generic secondary can suddenly became *your* school, complete with the teachers you detested and the mates you messed about with. Then it's basically a matter of getting expelled as quickly as possible.

Although gameplay is limited and the whole thing is set across three scrolling screens, Skool Daze provides hours of unruly fun. It only misses out on getting a solid 9/10 because the sequel, Back to Skool, is somehow even better, as you can let off stink bombs, get the teachers drunk on sherry and even explore the girls' school next door. The original, though, remains one of the best-loved games of the 8-bit era.

Developer:	Microsphere
Format:	Spectrum/C64
Price:	£6.95
Players:	One
SCORE:	8/10





›Skool's out

In *Crash* magazine (issue 25), the game's author Dave Reidy revealed that he intended Skool Daze to be the first in a trilogy of games. But while Back to Skool followed at the end of 85, the planned third game never materialised, with Microsphere releasing the somewhat flawed Contact Sam Cruise instead. The *Crash* article also indicated that clues to the third game were hidden in Back to School. What does it all mean? Well, we've managed to line up an interview with Dave so all will soon be revealed...



eMag

Retro Rated

Welcome to the *Retro Gamer* reviews section. Read on to discover the team's opinion on the latest commercial releases...

Arcade Legends: Street Fighter II



Sho-ryu-ken! Deliver a flying uppercut to your best mate's face with the latest TV game from Radica

Developer: Radica · **Price:** £24.99 · **Format:** n/a · **Players:** One/two



Picture the scene – it's 1992, you get up in the morning, head out to school and prepare for another argument with your mate about which is the better console. You had a Megadrive and your mate had a SNES. But he now has a shiny new copy of a game that would rock the world – Street Fighter II. There's no arguing with this, and no matter how convincing your counter-claims, the fact that the SNES got SFII and the Megadrive didn't was a right kick in the scrotum. But things would change, and eventually in 1993 Megadrive owners finally got their very own version of Capcom's legendary fighter.

Street Fighter II Special Champion Edition was much more than a simple port of the original game. As well as including all 12 fighters from the Champion Edition arcade game, it featured the Hyper Fighting update. The arrival of SFII on the Megadrive was made even sweeter by the constant claims that the console couldn't 'do' SFII. Yah boo sucks to you SNES owners! Well, at least until the SNES got its own version of Hyper Fighting anyway...



›Street Fighting Man

The story began back in 1987 with the release of the original Street Fighter. This arcade machine was a fairly basic one-on-one fighter starring Ryu and Ken, along with Sagat (the big boss). A notable feature of SF was the addition of rubber pressure-sensitive buttons. Depending on how hard you pressed these, your character would perform low-, medium- or high-powered attacks – a feature that would lead to many broken units. Eventually SF made it into homes on multiple formats, but didn't really set the world on fire.

SFII (dubbed The World Warrior) arrived in 1991 and was a phenomenal success. Boasting hugely improved graphics, eight larger-than-life characters, masses of complex moves and incredible special attacks, people just couldn't get enough. Which is lucky really, as Capcom had more than enough SF up its sleeve...

SFII appeared in homes in 1992, with the SNES being the first console to feature the game. This is perhaps the point at which the series really exploded. From here, Street Fighter was unstoppable, and countless editions appeared, including Champion, Hyper Fighting, Super, Alpha, EX and many, many more. In all, there have been over 20 different versions of the game. Even the original monochrome GameBoy had its own version, as did the Spectrum!

Ya-ta!

Continuing its successful partnership with Sega, Radica is now giving retro fans and gamers alike the chance to play the Megadrive version of SFII on their TVs, no console required. Not only that, but this edition of the Arcade Legends series is two player, meaning you can slap a friend silly whenever you like. And if you need a little respite from the fireball-slinging action, you can play Ghouls 'n' Ghosts, which is also included.

The pack consists of the usual tiny replica Megadrive power unit, to which two six-button controllers



are attached. These controllers are exactly like the original Megadrive pads, and are smaller and lighter than their three-button counterparts. As we've come to expect, the emulation of the titles is faithful to the Megadrive in every respect.

As one of the single largest influences on the videogaming world, Street Fighter II has been cloned to oblivion over the years. But make no mistake, this mass replication doesn't affect the original's appeal. Playing SFII SCE once more instantly conjures up the feeling you got back in the day when you pulled off those energy-sapping combos and finally managed to nail Zangief's spinning pile driver, drilling your mate's head into the ground with a satisfying thud. And no matter how long it's been since you originally played the game, it's amazing how quickly it all floods back – every special move, combo and cheap trick in the book is there from the off, and those epic SF skills you once demonstrated flow through your gaming veins once again.

Although not quite as good as the SNES incarnation, the Megadrive version is still super fine. Graphically, you can't fault the arcade reproductions of both the characters and arenas. Sure, the visuals are smaller and miss some frames of animation, but when you think that this originally ran on a 16-bit console, you realise how good the conversion is. The inclusion of Hyper Fighting is the key to the whole game though, and the ability to crank up the speed is what has kept the title alive all these years. Quite why anyone would play the standard Champion Edition mode is beyond us, as it's comparatively sluggish and doesn't pack the same punch as the Hyper Fighting mode. Crank up the speed on this baby though and you've got two-player bliss, pure and simple.

We shouldn't be blinded by the greatness of SFII though, lest we forget the other game in the pack.





Ghouls 'n' Ghosts is an enduring arcade classic, and although it's as hard as titanium-coated nails, it's addictive and enjoyable. But in all honesty, it's SFII you'll be buying the unit for.

Little kicks

We do have some minor complaints with this new bundle though. For one, the hardware needs a slight overhaul. Why doesn't Radica supply a mains adaptor instead of making us plough through AA batteries to play our old favourites? There's a port for a 9V cable on the unit, so why not give us the required components in the box? Then there's the Menu button – arrrggghhh! Placing this directly below the Start button is just insane, and you'll soon become irritated by the fact that you keep accidentally quitting to the Menu when you want to pause for a whiz or something. Finally, while we relish the chance to play the classic Ghouls 'n' Ghosts again, why is it on here? SFII and Ghouls 'n' Ghosts don't exactly fit together in a theme (apart from the fact that they're both Capcom titles), and surely the Megadrive version of Super Street Fighter II would have been a more fitting complement, or perhaps even Sega's own fighter, Eternal Champions.

Bad points aside, SFII SCE is a beast of a classic and like all genre-defying games, is as playable now as it was over 10 years ago. Giving gamers access to it again as a TV game is a great idea, enabling the legions of fans who sold their Megadrives long ago to replay this classic once more (with the proper pads, no less). For sheer two-player addictiveness, Arcade Legends is the best so far. Ha-do-ken!

Rating:

Gunbird Special Edition

Got the reflexes of a rattlesnake on speed? Then this mad blaster twin pack is just for you

Developer: Psikyo **Price:** £9.99 **Format:** PS2 **Players:** One



If there's one way to truly demonstrate your gaming prowess to your mates, it's with a shoot-em-up. These fast and frantic bullet fests are as hard as rock – the skills needed to dodge wave after wave of enemy fire and the reflexes required to outwit behemoth-sized bosses lie somewhere in the elite camp. Think you fit into this category? We'll only believe you after you've played this explosive double bill.

Gunbird Special Edition from Xplosiv brings 1994's arcade original and the 1998 sequel to the PlayStation 2 in one value pack. Both games are vertically scrolling and typically colourful Japanese blasters. You start by choosing one of several strange anime characters, including a flying vampire, a girl on a broomstick, an old man on a bike and even a fat guy on a magic carpet. Then, from the word go, it's bullet city. You see, Gunbird is all about bullets – not only yours, but the seemingly impossible number of enemy projectiles you have to avoid. After the first couple of levels, which are hectic in their own right, you'll come up against enemies that can literally fill the screen with *hundreds* of bullets. Only masterful precision and super-quick thinking will keep you alive for any amount of time.

Gunbird looks the part, and the screen is always alive with activity and graphical flair, but it really is rock hard. Staying alive for any prolonged period of time is frankly impossible for most, and although you do have unlimited continues, dying for the 100th time will ultimately test your tolerance levels. There are some powerful weapons you can use to fight back with, including smart bomb-style attacks, but you will find that you depend almost entirely on them to fight bosses and tougher enemies.







Perhaps more so than most shoot-em-ups, Gunbird is best in short bursts. If you're slogging your way through an adventure game, for instance, you could fire up Gunbird for a little light relief. Then again, if your shoot-em-up skills aren't second to none, you may end up more frustrated than satisfied. But at just £10 for two relatively rare Japanese shooters, this double pack has to be recommended, especially as its value will certainly rise when it disappears from the shelves.

If you're after a good-looking old-skool blaster, and have superhuman skills, then you'll want to show your mates exactly what you can do with this.

Rating:

›A well-known gun

This isn't the first time the Gunbird games have appeared on home consoles. The original was ported to the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn in 1995, but it was only released in Japan. Gunbird 2, meanwhile, appeared on the Sega Dreamcast in 2000, and this time it was granted a worldwide release. The DC sequel is now quite collectable, with copies regularly fetching around the £20 mark on eBay.



Space Tripper

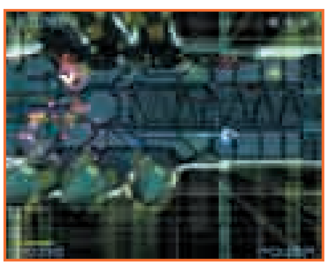
Classic retro blasting comes to the PC in this no-frills budget package on the Sold Out label

Developer: Pom Pom Games **Price:** £4.99 **Format:** PC **Players:** One



The shoot-em-up – one of gaming's dying breeds. What was once the most popular gaming genre around has slowly started to disappear over the years, because most people now want games as complex as rocket science, with twisting plots, long back stories and – groan – character development. But there's something about the classic shoot-em-up that still captures our hearts. Is it the purity and simplicity of it all? The mindless-yet-enjoyable play? Or the epic boss battles? We're not exactly sure, but one thing is clear: gaming just isn't the same without the shoot-em-up. Which is why we're taking a closer look at Space Tripper.

Now available on Sold Out's budget label for the bargain price of just £4.99, Space Tripper is pure, unadulterated retro action from the word go. The game is essentially a remake of the classic Graftgold title, Uridium, with a dose of Defender thrown in for good measure. So if you enjoyed those classics, you'll love this.



Blast or be blasted

With no plot to get in the way of the action, Space Tripper places you inside a ship and gives you 14 levels of blasting action to go at. Like Uridium you have to fly around the various worlds, flipping from left to right and taking out wave after wave of enemies. The Defender-style map shows you where you and the enemies are in the world, and you can obtain power-ups for your different weapons. Your ship has two weapons types – a concentrated stream of bullets and a wide spread pattern for clearing groups of enemies. What's different about this updated version is the levels themselves. Rather than the simple, flat 2D maps of Uridium, Space Tripper has full 3D landscapes with high and low areas, and if you're not careful, you can fall off the world and lose a life. Another improvement is the addition of some huge bosses, each with their own weaknesses and attack patterns.

Space Tripper reminds us of the buzz we got when we first played Jeff Minter's Tempest 2000 on the Atari Jaguar. The updated visuals, thumping soundtrack and fast action grip you and keep you coming back for more. And because of its simplicity you don't need a monster PC to run it either (a P400 will do nicely).

Sadly though, 14 levels isn't really all that many, and while the challenge is certainly steep, especially in later levels, it would be nice to have more substance. But each level does last quite a while, so don't think that this will be over in a few minutes.

If you hanker after the classic days of simple-but-addictive shooters and your trigger finger still itches, then Space Tripper is for you.

Rating:







>Imitation=flattery

Space Tripper takes more than a little inspiration from the classic Uridium. Uridium first arrived way back in 1986, long before many key shooter releases such as R-Type. In its day it was one of the most acclaimed shoot-em-ups around, possessing incredible visuals and maddeningly addictive play. An updated version of the original, Uridium Plus, was released soon after, and the Amiga got a souped-up sequel in the form of Uridium 2 in 1993.

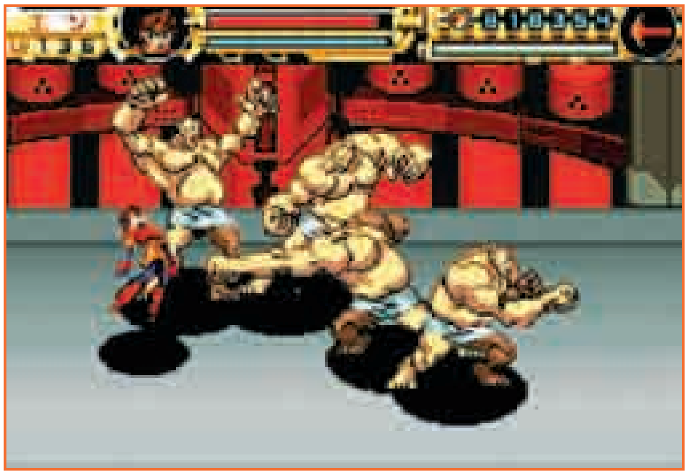


Advance Guardian Heroes

One of the Sega Saturn's most impressive games has been resurrected and updated for the GameBoy Advance

Developer: Treasure **Price:** £24.99 **Format:** GBA **Players:** One/two





Ask any retro gamer to name a few of the best developers around, and Treasure will certainly be somewhere in the list. Although the team hasn't exactly created the most well-known games over the years, producing very few big-name titles, its games are always innovative and impressive. Gunstar Heroes, Dynamite Headdy, Ikaruga, Bangai-o and Silhouette Mirage all demonstrate the skills and imagination of the team. One of the best games lurking in Treasure's chest is Guardian Heroes, originally released for the Sega Saturn. This was a side-scrolling battler that featured an insane number of playable characters. It looked great and played like a dream. We'd go as far as saying that it was one of the main reasons for owning a Saturn in the first place.

Now Treasure has resurrected the licence on the GBA with Advance Guardian Heroes. Like the original, it offers plenty of new twists on the side-scrolling beat-em-up. Advance Guardian Heroes isn't a direct reproduction of the original game, but instead tells its own story, with new characters and locations.

You play as an ancient warrior and have to fight an army of freaks and weirdos through a series of challenging levels. The central character (which you choose from a varied selection) possesses a range of combo attacks and magical abilities. As well as powers you can use in attack, you also possess a powerful magic shield that you can use to deflect enemy attacks and counter them, making for some great tactical fighting, especially in one of the many impressive boss battles (a Treasure trademark). When you defeat enemies you'll pick up experience gems, which you can use to upgrade your character after each level. This adds an RPG flavour to the game, and you can tailor your avatar to your own playing style.

Woah there!

As usual, Treasure has outdone itself in terms of graphical style, and the technical trickery on







show bears all the hallmarks of the team's past games. Sadly though, this eye candy also causes a serious problem – slowdown. While we accept that some games do slow down from time to time, particularly when a developer is pushing the hardware to its limits, Advance Guardian Heroes slows down far too much. Very rarely does the game run at full speed, making it both unappealing and difficult to play.

But while it seems that Treasure isn't actually perfect, Advance Guardian Heroes is still a good game. If it wasn't for the slowdown though, it would certainly be great.

Rating:

›Treasure chest

Treasure was founded in 1992 by a group of ex-Konami coders. Headed up by Masato Maegawa, the team grew tired of making endless sequels and wanted to expand its gaming horizons. It wasn't long before it had released the incredible Megadrive classic, Gunstar Heroes. This not only showed off the team's obvious technical abilities and creative ideas, but also introduced us to Treasure's fondness for assaulting players with OTT action and epic boss battles. Gunstar Heroes is hailed by many as the greatest Megadrive game ever, and it paved the way for a slew of new titles on the console, most notably Dynamite Headdy and Alien Soldier. When the 16-bit era ended, Treasure migrated to other platforms, including the Saturn and PlayStations 1 and 2. The team is still going strong today.







SVC Chaos: SNK Vs Capcom

The house of Capcom clashes with the house of SNK once again. It's a grudge match made in heaven



Developer: SNK **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PS2, Xbox **Players:** One/two

Ever since Street Fighter II kick-started the whole one-on-one combat genre, developers the world over have tried to reproduce Capcom's winning formula with their own titles. True, most of these pale in comparison to Capcom's original, but there are some that have won plenty of accolades. Most notable of these clones are offerings from arcade specialist SNK, responsible for the likes of King of Fighters and Samurai Shodown. Indeed, SNK's titles are seen by many to be the only challengers to Capcom's crown. It was inevitable then, that the two franchises would meet, and in 2000 Capcom released Capcom Vs SNK: Millennium Fight. This pits the finest Capcom and SNK fighters against each other, allowing SF evangelists to show their SNK fanboy mates who was the better fighter. Well, now it's all set to kick off once more, only this time SNK's at the helm. SVC Chaos is yet another battle between two beat-em-up giants.

On today's menu

No beat-em-up will succeed without a selection of impressive fighters to control, and as with Capcom's versions, SNK's title packs in plenty of popular characters, and a few more besides. SNK's team includes such favourites as Ryo, Terry, Kasumi and Mai, whereas the Capcom line up features obvious choices like Ryu, Guile, Chin-Li and Ken. In all there are an amazing 36 characters to choose from – 24 standard characters, a few hidden fighters and a couple of secret bosses. The cast spans the history of the respective titles and as you'd expect, all of their combat styles and the vast majority of their special moves are present and correct. Many rare costumes can be accessed too, which should please the hardcore fans out there.

SNK is well known for its solid 2D combat engine, and SVC Chaos is no exception. SVC is all about fast and frantic action, and the usual counters, combos, and high-powered specials deliver maximum damage if timed correctly. The speed is superb, making for some intense fights, but there is a problem. The game uses a four-button control method for the main combat moves (a weak and strong option for both kick and punch). This means that those used to the six-button controls of SFII will be at a disadvantage, and it also limits the attack options. Although SFII characters will maintain most of their moves and abilities, we'd bet that experienced SFII fans will be disappointed.

However, our main problem is with the single-player game, due in part to the suspect AI on show. The CPU often relies on insistent use of one or two attacks, including repeated use of specials (over, and over, and over…), meaning you don't really get much out of the fights. It's like playing against a novice who has found one move and is sticking with it.

Overall SVC Chaos is a bit of a mixed bag. Veteran SNK fans will no doubt love it, but the Capcom faithful may find the controls restrictive. For everyone else though, SVC Chaos is a fine one-on-one fighter, and while the single-player mode is a little weak, the multiplayer game is a blast.

Rating:

›Mystery guests

SVC Chaos contains a collection of hidden fighters, many of which can be found very easily. To unlock the majority of the secret characters simply highlight a character and hold down the right trigger (on the Xbox) or R1 (on the PlayStation 2). Try this with different characters and you'll soon have a completely new roster of fighters.





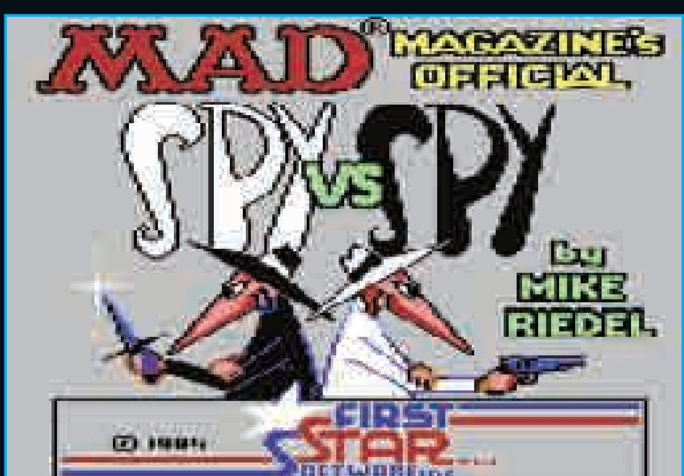
We once again take a look at long-running game series that are about to be updated. This month, madcap caper Spy Vs Spy and zombie opus Resident Evil

Spy Vs Spy

It was back in 1984 that the *MAD* magazine comic characters arrived on home systems for the first time. And as soon as Spy Vs Spy hit the shelves, people lapped it up. Why? Because they'd never experienced such unique gameplay. You could actually have two players competing on the same screen, *at the same time!* This was no simple sports game or shoot-em-up though. It was much more interactive than that, and you could manipulate the environment around you.

As either the 'black' or 'white' spy you had to collect a number of useful objects (passports, briefcases and so on) that were hidden throughout the level. Each level consisted of several rooms, containing desks, drawers, plants and the like, any of which could hold the object you were looking for. But – and this is why the game was so popular – the best way to win the game was to set traps for your opponent. If you thought he was going to have a root around in a particular desk you could hide a bomb in it, so that he was blown to bits. And if you didn't want the white spy to come through a certain door you could perch a bucket of acid on the top to make sure he didn't. It was this trap system that made it such a fun two-player game, and although the gameplay itself was fairly thin on the ground, it was still a great multiplayer title. It wasn't all about traps either, because if the two spies met in the same location, combat would ensue. The goal was to find the items required to book your passage on a plane and escape to the airport before your enemy.

Setting traps for your foe, then waiting with baited breath as they neared your ready-and-waiting surprise, led to some truly memorable moments. When your opponent did bite





Spy Vs Spy was the first game that allowed two players to compete on one screen at the same time





the big one thanks to a fiendishly placed trap, your spy would snigger at the unfortunate demise of his pointy-nosed doppelgänger. The whole experience was just so satisfying.

So popular was the first game that two further titles followed in its wake. In 1985, Spy Vs Spy II: The Island Caper was released. This replaced the office environment of the first game with a desert island, and changed the collectables to parts of a rocket, which the winning spy would use to escape. Traps were also reworked to reflect the environment – snake traps, coconuts and more were included, as well as guns to aid combat.

The third game in the series was released the following year and was entitled Spy Vs Spy III: Arctic Antics. Again, the same gameplay was present and only the settings and traps changed. The spies could now set traps using dynamite or pickaxes, or could saw holes in the ice. The objective was the same as in the previous game though – you still had to find parts of a rocket.

Although the gameplay didn't really change over the three instalments, the adventures of the *MAD* spies endured, and people still enjoy the two-player trickery today. Which is just as well because there's more on the way...

Live and let spy

It's almost 20 years since the third game was released and two-player covert capers are set to make a return. Take 2 Interactive is soon to release its new console update of the series.

The game combines 3D rendering with cartoon visuals and accurate characterisation. Spy Vs Spy still includes all the things that made the original game great, but also boasts a huge wealth of new additions. The main game itself is a story-based 3D platformer, along the lines of Crash Bandicoot. As either black or white you have to perform a range of missions while taking on legions of enemies, and as usual you must be wary of the constant plotting of your rival spy, who's also out to get the goods. This means that despite the new twists and visual polish, the game still features the black and white spies' fight for supremacy and, of course, a range of entertaining traps will be present. There are all-new enemies to fight, a wide range of cool-looking locations (including labs, haunted houses, villas and fun fairs), and more traps and weapons to put to devilish use.

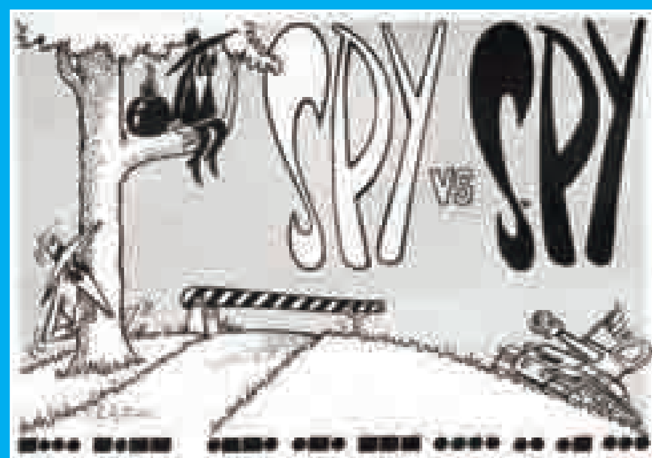
As well as the story mode, there are four-player deathmatch-style battles in which you also use traps, such as the new laser trip bomb, making for some hectic, espionage-fuelled multiplayer gaming. For Spy Vs Spy purists there's also the classic mode, which replicates the original gameplay of the series – you simply have to collect a range of objects before your opponent does. Even the classic traps make a reappearance in this mode (you just can't beat the acid bucket over the door).

We've had the opportunity to play this new update and while it strays a little into modern platform territory, it also emanates the pure Spy Vs Spy feel. As a two-player game it really is looking excellent. Spy Vs Spy is available on PS2 and Xbox and has the apt release date of April 1.

›MAD for it

The Spy Vs Spy comic strip first appeared in the 1950s and was the brainchild of Cuban cartoonist Antonio Prohias. Influenced heavily by the cold war, Prohias was a brave man who drew cartoons that criticised the government. Making any form of criticism of the government of the time was a risky business, and in Cuba, doubly so. In 1960, Prohias was wanted for arrest, so fearing for his safety he fled the country and headed to New York.

Eventually he managed to get an appointment with a publisher, EC Publications. His example comic was a strip about two guys trying to poison each other, a simple enough idea that got him a position. The strip appeared in issue 60 of *MAD* magazine in 1961, and Spy Vs Spy was born. Eventually, ill-health forced Prohias to quit writing the series and the licence was taken up by in-house *MAD* artists. Prohias' name stayed on the by-line though, in Morse code format below the title. The series was eventually exhausted and ended in 1994. Prohias sadly died in 1998.







Time may have moved on since the last game, but the spies are still out for each other's blood

Resident Evil



Capcom's Resident Evil 4 has a somewhat misleading title. What appears to be the fourth game in the series is more like the 24th, if you count all the sequels, spin-offs and updates that have spawned since the release of the original. And spawned is definitely the operative word – three versions of the original game appeared for the PlayStation (the standard release, Director's Cut and Duel-Shock Director's Cut), and there was even a scaled-down spin-off for the GameBoy Color. But the numeral in the title is useful, as it marks the new game out as a long-overdue entry in the core series. Forget the GameCube remake, satisfying as it was. Forget the rubbish Survivor trio of titles, and the rather embarrassing Outbreak games. And definitely forget the straight PlayStation ports that have appeared on the Dreamcast and GameCube. This is a true sequel, and it's claiming to be Resident Evil reinvented. But in order to move the series forward, Capcom has had to go back and look what made the original such a great game in the first place.

Zombie Holocaust

Resident Evil was released for the PlayStation and Saturn back in 1996. In a developing 32-bit market intent on luring potential investors with the lightning-smooth visuals of WipEout and Ridge Racer, the game stumbled onto the scene and began to raise adrenalin levels in a far more subtle manner. Borrowing the gameplay and visual style from the Alone in the Dark series on the PC, Capcom built on this to create the closest thing ever seen to an interactive horror movie. The plot – three guys and a girl holed up in a house besieged by zombies – was obviously indebted to *Night of the Living Dead*, but Capcom managed to play on many of our fears: of being eaten alive, of the dark, of confined spaces and, in particular, of bloody great spiders and snakes.

The previous Resident Evil games took place in and around Raccoon City, a decaying district in the American mid-west. The first game began with the discovery of a mutilated female hiker in some nearby foothills. Most of her party were missing and the local police department had called in a special taskforce called STARS. During their search of the mountainside, the unit located a mansion overlooking the city…

Taking control of either Chris, a trained marksman, or Jill, a machine expert (and the "master of unlocking", no less), you had to explore the mansion and discover why the corridors were crawling with shuffling zombies and oversized insects. It seemed to have something to do with a sinister biochemical outfit named Umbrella, who had been conducting weird experiments on the mansion's grounds.

As it's been watered down a lot thanks to the never-ending series of cash-ins and clones, it's easy to forget that the original games succeeded in creating a surprisingly scary atmosphere. Imagine bunking up in Stephen King's Overlook Hotel with a bunch of Romero's 'ghouls' and you're nearly there. The moment most players will remember is when you first ventured down the ground floor corridor in the east wing and a damn zombie dog crashed through the window. It was perfectly timed, skilfully executed and as scary as hell – perhaps the first time a videogame actually made people 'jump'.

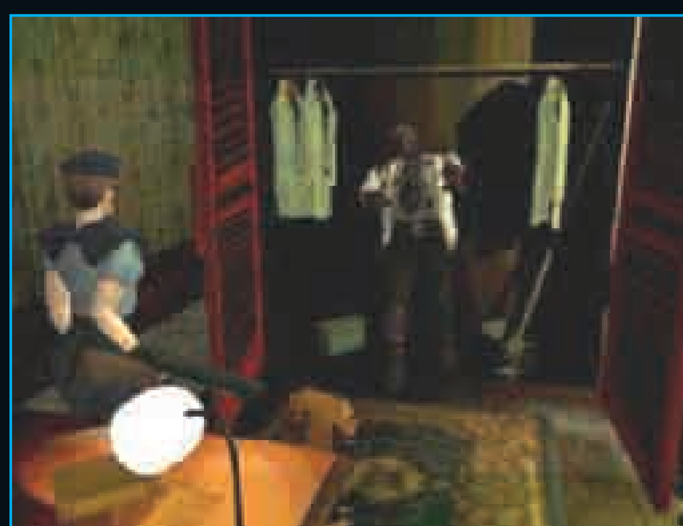
City of the Living Dead

Players were immediately hooked and many saw the game through to its explosive conclusion. Capcom, never one to shy away from a potential franchise, went on to satisfy gamer demand with the release of Resident Evil 2 in 1998. The story picked up two months after the first and charted the fall of Racoon City. The living dead were now lining the streets and a handful of survivors had gathered in the relative safety of the Raccoon City Police Department. Unsurprisingly, the local law enforcers were a little thin on the ground, and before you could say "Assault on Precinct 13", familiar foes were crawling through windows and busting down the doors.

Unlike the demanding first game, the sequel was too easy. The days of perilously dodging zombies in a bid to save shots were over as ammunition was abundant. The puzzles were also unchallenging and formulaic, meaning you rarely had to engage your brain. In trying to top the original in every way, Capcom had simply multiplied everything by two. A couple of playable characters (new recruits Leon and Clair) were once again available, but there were now four scenarios to complete and each included more enemies, weapons, locations and gore.

In comparison, 2000's Resident Evil 3 was more restrained, and better for it. If the first game was a homage to *Night of the Living Dead*, and the sprawling sequel had more in common with *Dawn of the Dead*, then appropriately

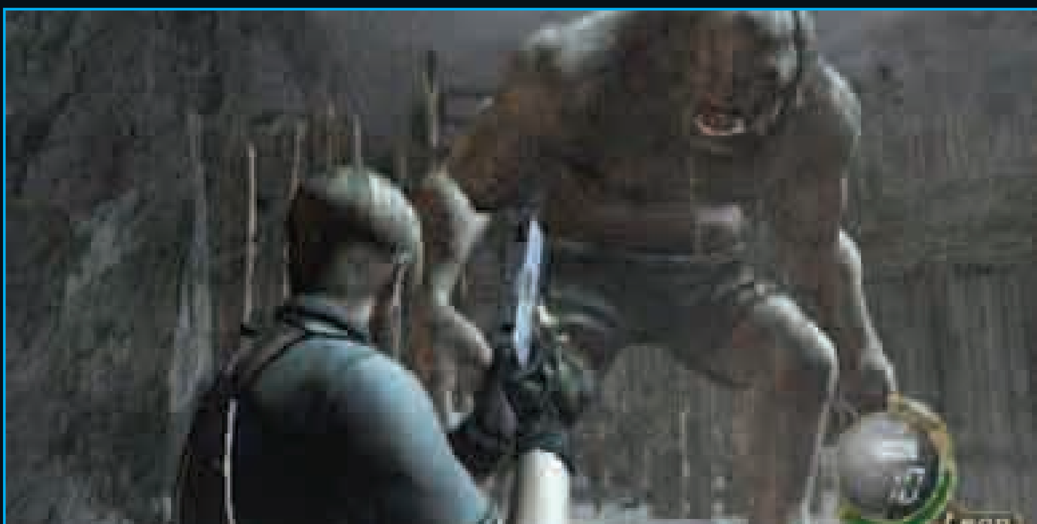




Looking fairy primitive by today's standards, the original Resident Evil still manages to rival Silent Hill in the scare stakes



Resident Evil 4 looks absolutely amazing, with monsters that literally fill the screen



enough, the third game was the trilogy's *Day of the Dead* – subdued and shorn of excess. In many ways it was a considered return to the style of the original.

But Capcom soon went back to the bigger-better-more path with the release of Code Veronica for the Dreamcast. This excellent update did away with the pre-rendered graphics, but perhaps unwisely retained the original control system, with characters turning unconvincingly on the spot. The more recent Resident Evil 0, meanwhile, re-introduced the pre-rendered backgrounds, but again kept the much-criticised control system. And that brings us very nicely to the new game.

Cannibal Apocalypse

Resident Evil 4 takes its cue from recent action adventures like Splinter Cell, utilising a much more modern engine. Your character moves in the direction in which you press the controller stick, with the camera following diligently behind. Pressing the 'aim' button presents you with an over-the-shoulder view, allowing you to target enemies with ease. The game engine is built for action, which is just as well as the game lays it on thick and fast. This time around the enemies are not mutated but just plain mad, running around and attacking you with whatever they can get their hands on, be it spades, scythes or pitchforks. However, the shift toward out-and-out action does come at the expense of the series' trademark problem-solving gameplay, and while there are basic elements of resource management, the few puzzles you encounter can be solved in a matter of seconds.

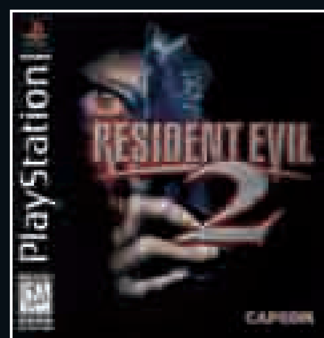
In many other respects though, the game does remain faithful to the original. It retains the bad B-movie acting and dialogue (although it's almost done as a knowing nod rather than out of necessity), and the throwaway plot is as daft as it's ever been (just one man – Leon from RE2 – sent to rescue the US President's kidnapped daughter?). And of course, there are the usual big ugly bosses with their obvious weak points (hmmm... wonder if I should concentrate my firepower on its single, oversized eye?). But most of all – thanks to the unpredictable enemies, amazingly detailed visuals, and the clever use of location – Resident Evil 4 is as scary as the first game. And that, above everything else, is what we want from a Resident Evil game.

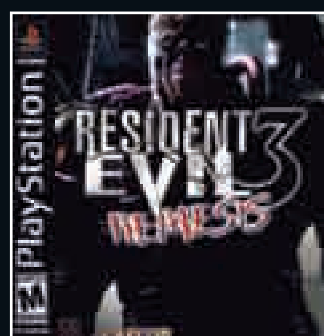
After several years in the wilderness, the series is back on track. Resident Evil 4 is available now for GameCube, and later in the year on PlayStation 2.

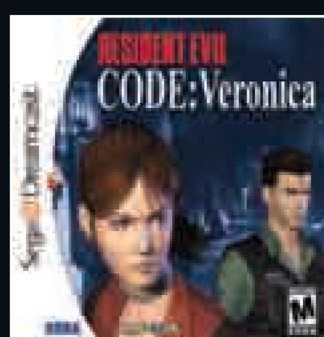
›Acting dishonours

The original Resident Evil is famous for its fabulously bad 'acting' and dialogue. You can listen to some of the 'best' clips from the game at www.audioatrocities.com, a site that celebrates awful videogame voice acting. Our personal favourite is when Jill nearly gets eaten alive by zombies and burly Barry exclaims: "*That was too close... you were almost... a Jill sandwich!*"









eMag

Welcome back to Japan! This month in the new section devoted the Japanese retro scene, we'll take a look at what is possibly the most recent retro format, review the best Macross game ever, and try to explain the appeal of Casio-style glow-in-the-dark Nintendo gaming

›Format focus: the Sega Saturn



Should we even be writing about the Saturn in these pages? Is it really a retro console? Well, that depends on your definition of 'retro'. If we can agree that the Saturn is both commercially obsolete and the host to countless old-skool classics, then there's little reason to question its inclusion.

While its failure in the West led to the blasphemous ridicule of Sega and all but ended the Dreamcast's chances of Western success, Japanese gamers loved the Saturn and titles like Sega's Virtua Fighter 2 shifted over 1.7 million copies. Today, Sega's Saturn (alongside the PC Engine, Famicom and Super Famicom) is given pride of place in Japan's retro gaming shops. Its popularity continues to hold fast in spite of the relatively high prices that its games command. So this begs the question: why? What makes the Saturn so attractive to gamers today, more than a decade after its introduction?

For one thing, the Saturn games catalogue boasts almost as many 2D shoot-em-ups as the NeoGeo's library does beat-em-ups. But more than quantity, it's the *quality* of 2D Saturn games that really cannot be beaten. Even early on in the system's life, titles such as Layer Section hinted at what was possible. Later, though, with the introduction of memory expansion cartridges, 2D games producers found the Saturn to be far more capable than its peers.

The memory expansion carts came in 1MB and 4MB versions, often bundled with the games that necessitated their introduction – titles such as X-Men Vs Street Fighter and various editions of SNK's King of Fighters series. The 4MB carts effectively tripled the amount of RAM available, ensuring smooth animation in-game and quick loading between bouts of action. A 4MB cart costs about Y2,000 today (£10), but game-plus-expansion packages can be better value.

In fact, there are many Saturn bargains to be had. The hardware itself is something of a steal: we bought a complete and boxed original grey model for Y3,500 (less than £20), and unboxed examples tend to go for a tenner. With regard to games, there are some ridiculously



Just some of the Sega Saturn games on sale at our local retro shop in Osaka

cheap classics available. Mainstream Saturn hits – Sega Rally, Virtua Fighter, Virtual On, Daytona USA, NiGHTS, etc – can be bought for less than a pound each. (World Record: Virtual On – mint, complete and just 10p in Osaka!)

However, many of the 3D games are cheap for a reason – most of them have been surpassed by games appearing on the following generations of console hardware. It's in the 2D realm that the Saturn really comes into its own.

Old-skool shooters

For various reasons, many small Japanese developers (Xing, Psikyo, *et al.*) chose to port their finest 2D wares to the Saturn. Arcade Gears is a good point of entrance for those who are curious about the late 2D productions of small Japanese houses. It captures two of Xing's finest shooters – Image Fight and X-Multiply – in arcade-perfect fettle. This is a moderately expensive title in today's market, though. Our local retro store has a copy for Y8,500 (nearly £45). Similarly, ADK's weird puzzle/shoot-em-up hybrid Twinkle Star Sprites is going for Y9,800 (£50) – although, it must be said, these prices compare favourably with the rates for NeoGeo versions.

The Saturn was also seen as the perfect place to retire old legends. Xing ported a late arcade edition of Bubble Bobble, the operatically titled Bubble Symphony, which is especially good. Likewise, Taito's Elevator Action, a Japanese competitor to Impossible Mission, was given a very late sequel that was ported from Taito's F3 arcade system to the Saturn. Elevator Action Returns on the Saturn usually sells for Y7,000 (£35), but it really is worth every penny.

Even a few great 2D hits can be found at low prices. Layer Section, as we've mentioned, is actually one of the best Saturn shoot-em-ups available and we found it for just Y900 (£5) at our local retro emporium. Raizing's Soukyugurentai and Psikyo's Gunbird, both of which are rock solid blasts, can be bought for just Y2,500 each (less than £15).

Saturn games are leading lights in their respective genres. You'll go a long way to find a better racer than OutRun, a mightier shoot-em-up than

›Odds and ends



The Sony PSP may be the flashiest piece of gaming kit around this decade, but there's still room for a few Namco classics on the new portable. Namco is to release a compilation of 11 arcade classics from the 1980s, available on one UMD for Y3,980 (£20). It's a tempting proposition and we'll bring you a full review next month.

Heard of Suntory? Bill Murray went to work for this drinks giant in *Lost in Translation* and now Nintendo is collaborating with the company. The 500ml bottles of Pepsi Twist and Diet Pepsi Twist will soon be sporting 8-bit pixel design Mario bottle caps. Better yet, 1.5 litre bottles of Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, Pepsi Twist and Diet Pepsi Twist will come with a great freebie – a roll of tape featuring old Nintendo designs. A total of 30 different bottle caps and eight different rolls of tape can be collected. Rest assured, we'll give it our best shot.

The newest addition to the ever-expanding library of Gamest Mooks is a tribute to early Sega formats such as the SG1000, the Master System, the GameGear and the Megadrive. Mooks (hilariously named for we know not what reason) is Japan's authoritative series of games-related reading material, and the new Sega volume will feature a disc full of Sega emulators. At Y1,200 (£6), Japanese retro gamers have a cool (if comparatively limited) alternative to the magazine you're reading now.

›Pocket gaming

What's in our jacket pocket this month? A GameBoy Light!



Released in gold and silver shades of chromed plastic, 1998's GameBoy Light is the ultimate evolution of monochrome portable gaming. It displays fewer sprites than the mono NeoGeo Pocket or WonderSwan, but even today, its fantastic backlit screen is only really surpassed by Sony's new PSP.

In pitch black surroundings, the GameBoy Light's bright blue glow is powerful enough to burn Tetris blocks on your retinas. Remarkably, its battery life is over 10 hours and the system only requires two AA batteries. Flick the light off and you can play for closer to 20 hours. In form, it's virtually identical to the GameBoy Pocket (which was pretty sleek) and for multiplayer games it can be linked to all other pre-GameBoy Advance models.

There are some very cool limited editions of the GameBoy Light. A special Pikachu version was produced for the Tokyo Pokémon Center back in 98, but only 5,000 of these bright yellow systems were made. The same number of Skeleton Famitsu variants were manufactured. A translucent yellow Toys 'R' Us version (which looks almost as ugly as it sounds) was given a similarly limited run, while the rarest GameBoy Lights are the Osamu Tezuka and Astro Boy licensed models, of which only a few hundred units were made.

Even in Japan, the only place where the GameBoy Light was officially released, it's quite unusual to find the system in shops. If you do ever see one, we suggest you pick it up without hesitation. And no, you can't have ours, because we still like to play Tetris in the dark.

Radiant Silvergun, or, for that matter, a better six-player side-scrolling beat-em-up than Treasure's Guardian Heroes. No matter what type of 2D action you crave, Sega's Saturn has it covered. Sprite-based arcade racers, for example, are happily retired on Saturn. The finest non-PCB versions of awesome games such as Chase HQ and Power Drift can also be found on the system, and a solid arcade racing controller from Sega can easily be yours for Y2,000 (£10).

To complete the equation, the ergonomics of the standard Saturn pad and Sega's arcade stick are such that – like the NeoGeo and NeoGeo CD controllers – it somehow only feels right to play 2D games. Hammer Radiant Silvergun on the original Saturn pad, then move over to a bout of Astra Superstars with a couple of arcade joysticks. In Japan, we say 'kanpeki', which means 'perfect'. Don't pass up on the Saturn just because it arrived so late – this is a great new wave format for many retro gamers.

›Daihitto! Award

This month's Daihitto! (big hit) Award goes to legendary Super Famicom shoot-em-up Macross: Scrambled Valkyrie

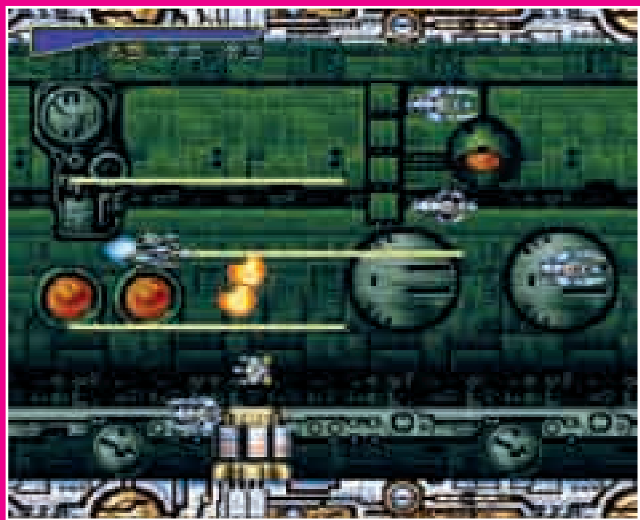
Shoot-em-ups don't get much tougher than Zamuse's 1993 anime classic. Think Viewpoint on the NeoGeo but add to this another level or two of rock-hard challenges. Macross: Scrambled Valkyrie offers three piloted mech suits in which you can blast through the galaxy. Each pilot has individual strengths/weaknesses, but once a decision is made that character must be controlled to the finish. So, you bite the bullet, select your craft, and take off. And then it hits you.

Scrambled Valkyrie is not a typical shooter. Instead of a 'one hit and you're dead' policy, as favoured by most shoot-em-ups, Macross grants players the seeming security of an energy gauge – only when this is completely depleted will you be in danger of dying. Paradoxically, though, there is a greater level of stress in attempting to maintain your craft's energy than there is in simply having to avoid every bullet.

The game's level design is wildly inventive. For instance, in the opening Emergency stage, huge floating structures will suddenly rise, leaving your craft only a narrow gap to get through. Wormholes will also appear just as you start to shoot down the first mini-boss, dragging your mech into energy-sapping nothingness. In the second level, The Planet Earth, things get hectic quickly as screen-filling bosses fire lasers and bullets simultaneously. By the time you reach the seventh and final stage, A Basis For Love, pretty much every possibility available to this interactive Macross has been explored.

The fact that Valkyrie manages to outplay most shoot-em-ups, however, is largely down to its solid foundation: a simple two-button control system. One button shoots (X is a good choice) and the other (Y) enables you to alternate between the three available weapons. Each of the three mechs has its own arsenal of three unique firearms and, to complete the triangle, there are three levels of power with which to improve these arms. Simple and just plain deadly.

To top it all off, this is a beautiful game with zero slowdown, great effects and detailed backgrounds. Scrambled Valkyrie is one of the prettiest 16-bit shooters ever made. But what do you have to pay for such beauty? About Y3,000 (£15). Bargain.



Desert Island Disks

This month's chosen castaway is Gordon Houghton, former Editor of *Zzap!64* magazine



If you grew up in the eighties, you probably experienced the dreadful realisation that despite rudimentary efforts to get a sprite moving round a blank screen, machine code was an incomprehensible mystery and thus you were never going to achieve your dream of becoming a games programmer. The obvious disappointment was tempered, though, by the hope that you could perhaps secure the second best job in the world – games reviewer. A life of playing the games you loved before anyone else, dispensing judgement from on high and even getting a pencil sketch of yourself with thumbs aloft in the pages of a glossy news-stand magazine... a career to die for. So it would be natural to assume that for a young Gordon Houghton, who had just completed an English degree at Magdalen College, Oxford, in between long Spindizzy sessions, games journalism was the obvious career choice.

"No, I've only ever really wanted to be a novelist," confesses Gordon. "I never joined in with the journo crowds at school or university and never worked on a magazine before *Zzap!64* In fact, *Zzap!64* was the first games magazine I tried, and to be honest, when I read it I thought it was a pile of infantile crap. I was embarrassed to be seen holding it." Not a promising start to a relationship that would see Gordon become a staff writer and later editor of the magazine in the late eighties. Fortunately, he continued reading and his initial hostility faded.

"After a few months it grew on me and I saw what it was trying to do. I eventually tried other mags, like *Commodore User* and (in a moment of madness) *Commodore Computing International*, but they just made *Zzap!64* look even more attractive. I never consciously thought I could do better. I applied for a job there because I'd be combining the two things I loved: games and writing. By that time I was pretty much addicted to Commodore 64 games anyway, and reviewing seemed like a fun and lazy way to indulge the habit."

Crashed out

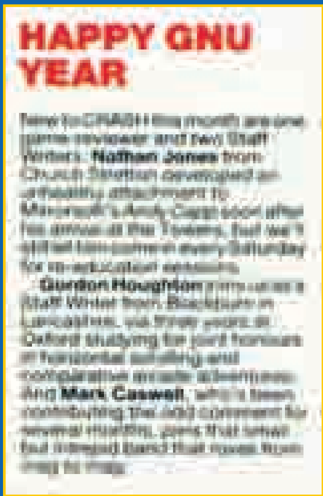
Zzap!64 may have been the first games magazine Gordon read, but his gaming stretches back to 1973 and Pong in the foyer of the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool, at the tender age of eight. An Atari 2600 followed and, of course, a Commodore 64. We wonder if he was ever involved in those playground Spectrum vs C64 arguments that raged on well after the bell had gone?

"There was no need, really. The C64 was so self-evidently superior. The Spectrum was a bit like the crippled dog in the corner, whimpering for attention. I just ignored it."

It is therefore particularly ironic that such a staunch advocate of the C64 should land his first job as a writer for none other than the Spectrum champion, *Crash* magazine. Surely there was some mistake?

"I wrote to *Zzap!64* on spec. They said no thanks, but my details were passed on to *Crash* who, unfortunately, took me on. They were the most miserable two months of my life. The guys in the *Zzap!64* offices next door were always laughing, always cracking jokes, always taking the mickey out of each other, whereas the *Crash* offices felt like a funeral parlour – it was a deathly silent and depressing place. And *Crash*





HAPPY GNU YEAR



A fresh-faced Gordon joins Newsfield, his arrival announced in the pages of *Crash* magazine

had a guy working for them who (I discovered later) was a renowned bully and would, if you so much as spoke to him, reply with sarcasm, scorn, abuse, or whatever else came into his tiny mind. He was a sadly psychologically damaged character, and I won't mention his name, but only because it allows me to say without fear of libel that he was the biggest dickhead I've ever met."

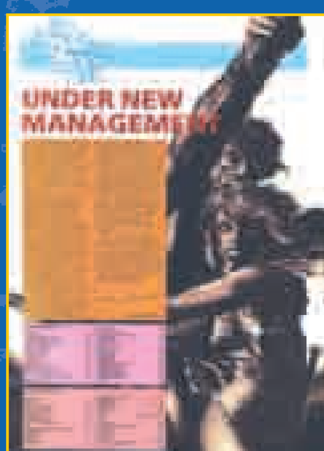
Thankfully, Gordon escaped with only emotional scars, and landed a post on his intended target, *Zzap!64*, at the end of February 1988. He recalls a certain apprehension on entering Zzap! Towers, partly due to an awkwardness in new situations (which might explain his penchant for The Smiths and Woody Allen films, as mentioned in the editorial that welcomed him to the magazine) but also because he was worried that his games-playing skills simply weren't good enough.

"I felt like I was going to be rumbled but it turned out that me, Paul Glancey and Steve Jarrett were pretty much equal in skill terms, even if Jaz Rignall was a gaming god."

Julian 'Jaz' Rignall, who had been with the magazine from the start, was editor when Gordon arrived. While his gaming prowess has never been in question, less than positive things have been said about his management style in these very pages (in issue seven of *Retro Gamer* we covered his casual dismissal of Keith Campbell from *C&VG*).

"I don't want to disappoint anyone, but he was a really nice guy. From a personal point of view, I got on better with Steve (Jarrett), but Julian's enthusiasm for his job was infectious, and shone through everything he wrote. He was much the same outside work too – always enthusing about great games and very funny when condemning anything that was rubbish. He had an informal management style. You always





Gordon's first issue of *Zzap!64* as a staff writer (left), and his introduction as the new editor in issue 40 (right)

"In fact, *Zzap!64* was the first games magazine I tried and to be honest, when I read it I thought it was a pile of infantile crap"

knew his word was final on reviews, but he never got heavy about it. That said, I remember Paul (Glancey) and I really liked Arkanoid and wanted to give it a Sizzler, but Jaz flatly refused, and that was the end of it. He was a top gamer too, as everyone knows, but he was equally capable of fending off irritating PR people and defending marks that he believed in."

Zzap! Sizzler!

The mention of the coveted Sizzler award and the reference to multiple reviewers giving their opinion on a game reminds us of some of the things that made *Zzap!64* unique and so revered amongst C64 gamers. We return to Issue 36 (thanks to Mort's invaluable magazine scan DVDs, courtesy of Kenz at **www.binary zone.co.uk**), the first that Gordon appeared in. We turn to his first review, The Train, a pretty decent World War II simulation from EA Games (the more things change...), and are reminded of the lengthy 'intros', which outlined fairly objectively the features and plot of a game, accompanied by critical evaluations, this time from Jaz, Paul Glancey and Gordon. We also note that Gordon uses the phrase 'beautifully evocative' almost a decade before *Edge* magazine copyrighted it. We wonder whether the awarding of marks above 90%, particularly those that resulted in the bestowing of a Gold Medal (normally a prompt for the reader to immediately put down the magazine and rush out to the shops), ever led to heated debates or even came to blows?

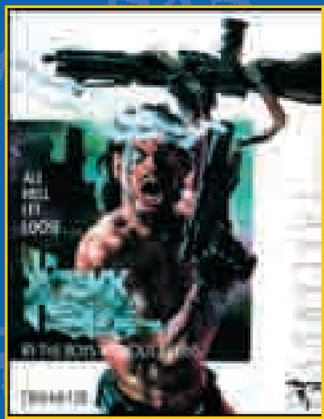
"Yeah, there were always arguments about the higher end marks (though rarely about the duff games), but usually if something was going to achieve Sizzler or Gold Medal status, we all had to agree on it. There were loads of times when two of us would think 'this should Sizzle', only for the third reviewer to insist it was the biggest pile of crap he'd played since Alice in Videoland. Those games usually ended up getting 89%. And then there was Hawkeye, of course..."

Ah, the Hawkeye affair. In his first month as Editor, taking over from Julian Rignall who suddenly departed after issue 39 (something that seemed to be the norm at publishers Newsfield – Gary Penn, Ciaran Brennan, Jaz and later Steve Jarratt, all left after falling out with the management team), Gordon was faced with reviewing the latest game from Thalamus, a software company owned by Newsfield.

"It wasn't pressure from Newsfield. It never said a word to us about Thalamus games and was always very protective about our editorial freedom. It was pressure from the PR guy at Thalamus. It was my first month in charge as Editor, and I really liked Hawkeye. I thought it had achieved something special graphically, it was a well-structured game, it was fun, and it was tough. But despite all that it didn't have greatness or originality stamped on it in the way that games like Paradroid, Spindizzy or The Sentinel did. I felt it should be a Sizzler. And then this bloody PR guy kept ringing me up, cajoling me, using all this wide-boy crap to convince me it should be a Gold Medal, and he just didn't give up, day after day. In the end I caved in and awarded it the Gold Medal. It was weak and shameful on my part, and I've regretted it ever since – not to the point where I've weep into my pillow every night, but like any job where you feel you've let yourself down, it leaves a sour taste in the mouth."

Gordon tells the tale with genuine remorse, though pressure from PR reps desperately trying to ensure not only coverage but favourable reviews for their products, was standard practice. And still is...

"They tended to be really, really angry if you slated their games, but who wouldn't be? Then again, the answer was simple: don't release crap games. But there were all kinds of subtle pressures companies exerted on magazines, from promises of big-name exclusives, to meals out, day trips,



A conflict of interests? After PR pressure, Hawkeye from Newsfield-owned Thalamus earned a Gold Medal

hotels, and so on. If you didn't go along with it, you were pretty much snubbed as far as exclusives went. And, of course, all these companies threatened to pull their ads from the magazine when they received particularly bad press. But that was the advertising department's problem, not ours."

16-bit onslaught

Zzap!64 certainly relied heavily on advertising income (it even went so far as to include an index of advertisers alongside the list of games reviewed that issue), but more importantly, it depended on games actually being released. Gordon took over the reins at a difficult time for the whole C64 scene. Whilst there were initially plenty of quality titles to cover, as attested to by the bumper Christmas 1988 Issue, which he proudly sights as the highpoint of his stewardship, things soon became problematic.

"For three months after Issue 44 we were getting almost *no* C64 reviews – we were having to badger people for games. It seriously looked as if the machine was dying. I personally believed, or maybe I just panicked myself into believing, that *Zzap!64* would thrive first as a combined C64/Amiga magazine, and then, when the C64 finally keeled over, as an Amiga-only magazine. I thought that was the way to preserve the *Zzap!64* brand and keep us all in a job. As it turns out, I was an idiot on many counts..."

Gordon did steer the magazine in a 'new direction', and one that didn't appeal to all readers. The Amiga coverage did increase, though it should be noted that this had begun tentatively in December 87 as a response to the growing interest in the new 16-bit machines – issue 36, his first on the team, featured reviews of nine Amiga games. His time as editor also saw an injection of humour and a conscious attempt to appeal to a C64 market that was changing as older readers moved on to the more powerful computers on the market.

"Until issue 47, it was fun, and something genuinely different, designed to appeal to *Zzap!64*'s increasingly younger readership. After that it was misguided and ill-judged. And all my fault. Many of the things we introduced were excellent. The *regular* Megatapes (they'd only been sporadic before then), the new characters, the livelier news and previews pages, more regular Challenges, monthly Zzapbacks, Tips Bible, and the Def Guides to game genres – all these ideas were new and fun and I think offered much more than *Zzap!64* had done in the past... But looking back on it, we probably went too far, too fast, and we alienated a bunch of the loyal readers.

"If I were to do it all again I'd scrap the rubbishy review artwork we blundered into around issue 47, though I would keep the non-review spreads Mark Kendrick did, many of which were fantastically lively and creative. I'd also severely cut the Amiga reviews, give massive coverage to the C64 stuff, not tell the head of US Gold to F-off, and promote world peace and understanding. On second thoughts, I'd probably still tell the head of US Gold to F-off."

Leaving Ludlow

As was commonplace at Zzap! Towers, Gordon was also told rather abruptly to F-off himself. He had even written the editorial for issue 50, the final one he edited, which was hastily rewritten and included the summary execution of Ken D Fish. He explains the background to his departure, and in doing so, gives an insight into the ongoing tension between management and the editorial team that was to blight *Zzap!64* throughout its existence.

"I think part of the problem with *Zzap!64* was the conflict between the people who had created and designed the magazine (Roger Kean, Oli Frey and so on) and the people they entrusted to edit it. It was very difficult for the former to let go of their intellectual property, and understandably so. The relationship became intolerable when certain editors and writers stopped being grateful for the job they'd been given and behaved in a way that was less than obedient. I might be way off the mark with that theory, but the truth is, very few of the people who left *Zzap!64* were bad writers or bad editors – in fact, most of them went on to have even more successful careers elsewhere.

"Our case was slightly different. We'd told Newsfield a couple of months before we left that we intended to quit by Christmas. We were causing bad feeling as a result of various internal company disputes and we were probably losing our way editorially. All of these things made it inevitable that we should leave sooner rather than later... And, to be fair to Newsfield, it was a good decision – Stuart Wynne's tenure in the *Zzap!64* hotseat was much longer and more stable than any of his predecessors."

And so Gordon left "the cultural desert" that was Ludlow, the location of Zzap! Towers. He continued as a freelance writer, contributing to various publications, including *Commodore Format*, a magazine he feels *Zzap!64* "could have been in its later years – bright, colourful, wittily written and brilliantly designed.

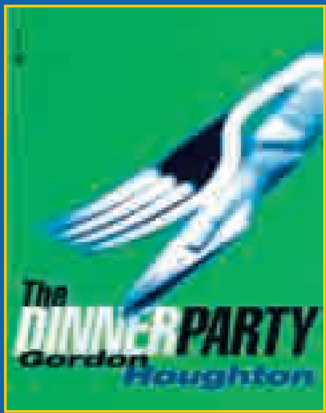
"The best magazine I worked on post-*Zzap!64* was *The One*, a radical Amiga/ST/PC glossy edited by Gary Penn. The reviews were great, the features were even better, and I personally don't think there's been a better games journal for grown-ups since. I carried on writing for various PC magazines until 1993 or so – at which point I realised I was just churning out the same old turgid rubbish and gave it all up."

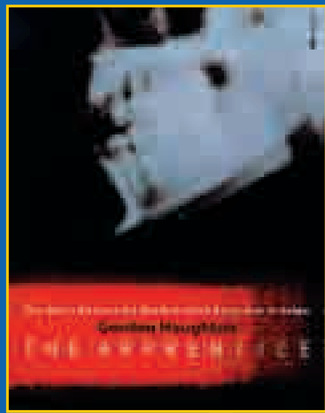
Novel idea

Games journalism might now be a thing of the past for Gordon, but writing certainly isn't. His childhood ambition of becoming a novelist was realised with the publication of *The Dinner Party* in 1998, a



Although the Amiga had featured in *Zzap!64* before, from issue 43 the 16-bit machine was integrated into the title for the first time





Both of Gordon's books are available to buy on Amazon. He's currently working on a new novel: "something to do with games and gamers..."

macabre black comedy involving self-mutilation and cannibalism. This was followed the next year by *The Apprentice*.

"It's been much more successful, selling in various editions all over the world. It's about a guy who gets resurrected, works for the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and tries to discover how he died. Neil Gaiman enjoyed it, so that's good enough for me."

Gordon then took a break from writing to help raise his two children. After seven years and seven courses of IVF treatment, Gordon describes becoming a father as "the hardest and best thing I've ever done," but now he has begun a new project which, he exclusively reveals, "has something to do with games and gamers. In fact, doing this interview and reminiscing has helped the book in many ways..."

Games are still a big part of Gordon's life, whether it's playing Super Mario World, Metroid or Donkey Konga with four-year old Sam and two-year old Sophie or maintaining his website (**www.the-burrow.freeserve.co.uk**), which includes a large Zzap! section. He clearly has fond memories of his time with Newsfield, and the people he worked with, many of whom have been in touch through his message board.

"It's a tremendous privilege to have been part of something that people remember so fondly. It was the best job I ever had, because it didn't feel like a job at all. It was just messing about with friends, playing games, and doing a bit of writing. The people I met there were among the nicest and funniest I've ever known... Paul Glancey – the nicest guy I met at *Zzap!64*. We encouraged him to leave for EMAP because we thought he'd have a better time there, but when he went, half the fun went with him. Maff Evans – I never could quite figure Maff out. He was very funny and could do amazing things with elastic bands, but he kept muttering about Front 242 and wandering off into the art department. To this day, I have no idea why he was made redundant with the rest of us. Paul Rand – he was much too wild and crazy for sleepy Ludlow. I liked him a lot, he was full of energy, and I'm not surprised he went on to better things in London. Steve Jarratt – probably the funniest guy I've ever met, though it has to be said I don't get out much. He was quite earnest about his job, as you should be, but his wit was second to none, and outside work he used to make me laugh like no one else. On top of all that he was a good guy, really thoughtful and kind. And Oli Frey – it amazed me how apparently effortless his work was. He'd knock up one of those wonderful, dynamic covers in an afternoon. I think my favourite was Zak McKracken (issue 47). It just captured the essence of that game, and it was one of his rare 'white' covers, too."

And special mention is, of course, required for Kati Hamza, fellow *Zzap!64* writer and now Gordon's partner and mother of those two children. We were hoping for tales of furtive glances during editorial meetings and blossoming romance over prolonged Uridium sessions, but the couple actually got together at university. Do they at least have a game from that time that they can call 'their own'?

"It's definitely Druid. We finished that game together: I played the druid, she took the golem's role. It's apt on so many levels."

Zzap!'s back

So, while Gordon professes no desire to return to games journalism, those days clearly have a special place in his heart, and on so many levels. Which might explain his involvement with *Zzap!64* issue 107, a project involving current C64 enthusiasts and some veterans of the magazine, including Paul Glancey, Oli Frey (who supplied the cover art) and, with finger nails surprisingly in tact, Gordon.

"A guy called Gazunta on the Zzap! Rrap message board suggested a farewell tribute to the magazine we'd all loved. In a moment of blind nostalgia, I and many others agreed. I was responsible for editing much of the writing (and contributing a few pieces here and there), but the main credit has to go to three people – Gazunta, for his organisation and motivation, Craig Grannell for his fantastic recreation of the look and feel of the mag, and Antony Stiller for drawing all the reviewers' heads. I thought it was an amazing piece of work, given that it was created almost entirely by unpaid 'amateurs', and I think we can all be very proud of the result."

You can download this massively impressive labour of love from the excellent **www.zzap64.co.uk**. Any plans for an issue 108 then, Gordon?

"Nope, definitely not. We've said our goodbyes."

"It was the best job I ever had, because it didn't feel like a job at all. It was just messing about with friends, playing games, and doing a bit of writing"



After a 10-year absence, *Zzap!64* returned with the release of issue 107. Despite Gordon's closing comments, issue 108 may actually happen!



›Gordon Houghton's Desert Island Disks

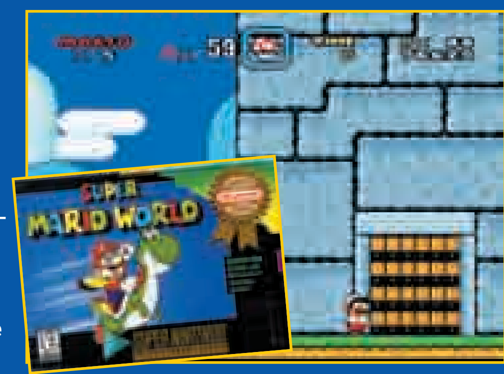
The Sentinel



C64, Firebird, 1986

This is the only C64 game in my list, and I bought it on the strength of the Gold Medal it received in *Zzap!64*. It was just… amazing. It still is. Like a 3D version of chess, but much better than that silly Star Trek effort. People complain now about how slow the 3D rotation is, but they're missing the point. The slowness just increases the horrible tension of trying to survive in an alien world – you're constantly looking for a place to hide or somewhere to climb up, and there's rarely time to think about your next move. The colour scheme was gloriously primal, too – blues, reds, greens and blacks – and it had these eerie sound effects and basic theme tunes that made it feel arcadey and spacey and weird. It was the most innovative game of its generation. A classic.

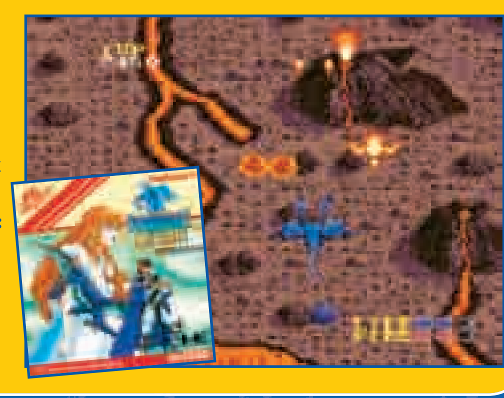
Super Mario World



SNES, Nintendo, 1990

The SNES is my favourite retro console and this is the best game on it. It's simply the greatest platform game ever made. I recently finished it again with my four-year-old son, and he loved it – but beating it is only half the story. You can reach Bowser by completing as few as 11 of the 96 levels, but dig a bit deeper and you find multiple layers of secrets – hidden stages, switch palaces and castles, and the amazing Star World… Finding the legendary Cheese Bridge secret area was one of my proudest gaming moments, but every single level is beautifully constructed. Mario 64, its successor, redefined the genre by pushing it (and pretty much everything else after it) into 3D – and that's a shame, because it killed off inspiring, well-crafted and truly great games like this.

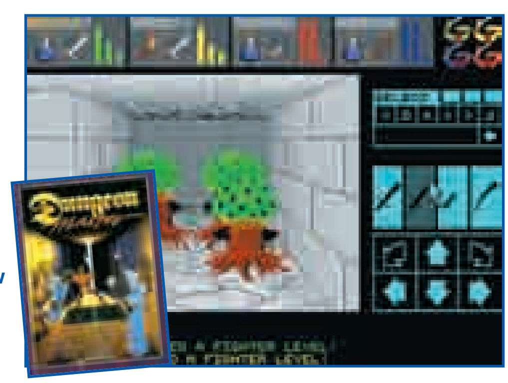
Dragon Spirit



PC Engine, Namco, 1988

This isn't the hardest shoot-em-up in the world, it's not even the hardest on the PC Engine, but it has that intangible 'something' that typifies for me what being a gamer means… It's all about feeling – those minute details that strike a chord in you, those gameplay features you haven't experienced before, the moments that simply make you feel good. So it was with Dragon Spirit: I'd never played a fantasy shooter before, it was my first game on the PC Engine, and from the moment I saw both of them together, I fell in love. It's not about the great music, the epic feel, or the fact that it's exactly the kind of simple, vertically scrolling blasting that I enjoy – what appeals to me is that you get to control a huge, three-headed, flame-spitting dragon that can burn plants, animals, birds, rocks and giant bosses to a crisp. What more do you need?

Dungeon Master



Amiga, FTL, 1989

The original FPS? Well, maybe not. This was the first role-playing game I ever finished. I reviewed it originally for *The Games Machine* on a four-colour CGA PC, but when I played it on the Amiga a few months later, it just blew me away. The block-scrolling dungeons were superb and the rare monster encounters were genuinely frightening (the screams of those mummies still scare me), but above all, the minimal sound made it the most amazingly atmospheric game I'd ever played. And behind all the effects it was a fantastic RPG – it threw you straight into the action, had brilliant characters, a great learning curve, a neat selection of weapons and spells, and a suitably epic climax. In recent years, the only games that have matched it in terms of storytelling and ambience are Half-Life and Ico. It was that good.

Tetris Attack



SNES, Nintendo, 1995

For me, this is the best puzzle game ever made. Pokémon Puzzle League on the Nintendo 64 was basically the same with a 3D mode and a few more options, but this version keeps it sweet and simple. The one-player game is just as addictive, but nowhere near as frustrating as Tetris (to which this bears almost no relation, despite the name). The two-player game is equally good, with a choice of time trial or versus modes, the latter of which sees you chucking blocks of compressed garbage on your opponent. It's the ideal desert island game, too: it's unbeatable, it has infinitely variable play, and you can never achieve perfection. It also features some of my favourite characters from the SNES classic, Yoshi's Island – and there's not a sign of Mario or Luigi anywhere.

Robotron 2084



Arcade, Williams, 1982

I was a Scramble fan back in the early 1980s – it was the first shoot-em-up I was any good at – but I was always intensely jealous of those gaming gods who played Robotron. It was, and still is, the definitive shooter: an insanely frantic kill-or-be-killed game blessed with fantastic sound effects and outstanding graphics. The odd thing is, I never really made a determined, prolonged assault on it until Midway Arcade Treasures appeared, at which point I didn't put it down for months. Even now I play it at least once a week. One of the few ambitions I have left is to own an original Robotron arcade cab. Oh, and Eugene Jarvis was a genius.

Radiant Silvergun



Saturn, Treasure, 1998

I didn't buy a Saturn until long after its death and I hadn't even heard of this until about 18 months ago. Personally, I think Ikaruga is a better shoot-em-up, one which transcends gaming and becomes a work of art when played by a master, but Radiant Silvergun is an epic game in its own right. I know it's a boring choice, given the broad spread of Treasure fanboyism on the Web, but it really is a giant game, and for a 2D shoot-em-up fan like me, it's a no-brainer. I still haven't beaten it and I'm nowhere near maximising chains, mastering individual weapons or getting 100% on all the bosses – so a desert island would be a great place to learn.

Zelda: Ocarina of Time



N64, Nintendo, 1998

This is simply the best game I've ever played. I wasn't a huge Zelda fan before it arrived – A Link to the Past excepted – but this had me gripped from start to finish. It's the only game that's ever made me cry, and it did it twice: when Link first became an adult, and then again during the closing movie, when I was just sorry to have finished it. I played it through again immediately afterward, and it bound me to the great sequels that have followed it, all of which have obsessed me. But Ocarina was the first to make me feel that computer games didn't have to be inferior to novels in terms of their narrative power. It's the greatest videogame story ever told.

ATARI 7800 ProSystem



In 1983 Atari was in a state of shock. The company that had made home videogaming a mainstream pastime was reeling from the realisation that nobody seemed to want its new 5200 console. As the year continued, the rest of the industry began to follow Atari into decline, leading many to believe that the era of the videogame was coming to an end. But not Atari. Instead, it set about creating a brand new console, the greatest console ever, competitively priced and vastly superior to anything that had come before. Peter Latimer looks back at the true 2600 successor, the Atari 7800 ProSystem

Atari had risen to fame on the astonishing success of the 2600 console. It had earned so much that by 1982 rumours were circulating that it was about to take over AT&T. It was in this atmosphere that Atari prepared to launch its new console, the Atari 5200, ready to show the world that the success of the 2600 was no one-off. Of course, it hadn't asked anyone what they wanted from this new console, but it didn't need to – it was Atari, the biggest brand in the business and it knew best. But shortly after the launch it became clear that something was very wrong. The 5200 was technically impressive but people just weren't buying it. Instead, rival systems were becoming popular with those eager to play the next generation of games. Atari hadn't so much built a bad console as the wrong console. It hadn't asked for its customers' opinions, but now it was getting them. People just didn't like this bulky, overpriced, non-2600 compatible console with its crazy controllers. Atari addressed the worst of the problems but privately knew it had lost this round of the console war and needed to start over with a brand new machine. It couldn't afford another mistake though, so this one would have to be the right console. It was finally time to talk to the public.

Atari commissioned an extensive study to find out just what gamers wanted from a new console and came to some simple, but very important, conclusions: no matter how good a console was, people would think twice if it couldn't play all their old 2600 favourites; the price really was a major consideration in deciding which console to buy; gamers wanted a console that could be expanded into new gaming directions as they became available; and most importantly, while people were interested in all kinds of games, it was the idea of bringing the arcade experience home that still excited them most – they still wanted the same kind of fun the 2600 had brought them in its heyday, but updated to handle modern, technically demanding arcade games. If Atari could offer people a console with great graphics, faithful arcade ports, realistic expansion capabilities, 2600 compatibility and a reasonable price tag, then that was a console that people would buy. Taking all this into account, Atari was ready to put the 5200 behind it and start work on a console that would embody everything gamers seemed to want – the Atari 3600.

Although Atari's marketing department had been happy with such catchy names as 2600 and 5200, it wasn't at all happy with the new console's name – 3600 sounded like a step backward from the 5200. No, a new beginning needed a much bigger number, one that had progress written all over it. The new console, it was suggested, should be called Atari 9000. But that was soon abandoned too when it became clear that if this pattern continued, future consoles might end up with ridiculously high numbers. But eventually, inspiration struck. The new console was going to offer graphics at least as good as the 5200, but would also be compatible with the 2600. And 5200+2600=7800.





While the 5200 wasn't exactly a failure, it never came close to matching the success of the 2600



An early promotion brochure for the 7800 promised a range of peripherals, including a keyboard, a high-score cartridge and, interestingly, an adaptor that would let you run 2600/7800 games on the 5200

Add that to the fact that Atari was planning a new range of accessories under the name 'ProLine' and you get the Atari 7800 ProSystem. With the name agreed upon and the market research complete there was just one more thing to take care of – the console itself. But by now Atari was losing US$2 million per day, so trying to develop this brand new technology alone seemed too risky. It needed a development partner, and was forced to turn to an old enemy for help.

Those meddling kids

Around 1978, MIT students Kevin Curran and Doug McCrae started running their own games arcade from their dorm. It was popular enough to bring in good money, but there was a flaw. New games made most money when people weren't particularly good at them. Once gamers learnt to beat the machine, games either lasted too long or players lost interest. Either way, the frequency of coins falling through that slot would drop and drop. Enhancement kits seemed to be the answer – kits that made an existing arcade game tougher or added new features so that players who had tired of the original version could be enticed back. But nobody had made one for Atari's Missile Command, and this was the game that the students really needed a kit for. So, along with the other students they lived with, Curran and McCrae built one themselves and by 1981 were marketing it across the US under the name General Computer Company. It was a big success and best of all, they'd even contacted Atari to ensure there were no objections.

So it probably came as something of a surprise when Atari sued for US$15 million, citing all kinds of infringements, expecting the students to just disappear under threat of legal action. But GCC thought it might be kind of fun to go to court. It managed to interest a lawyer who was willing to work for three meals a day and each time Atari appeared to have it cornered legally, GCC found a way to continue with business. Fearing a public relations disaster and recognising how talented the kids were, Atari eventually decided it made more sense to hire them than to fight them. The kids agreed and signed a contract to write games for Atari. GCC wasn't done though, and within weeks it was using the claim that it'd 'trounced' Atari in court as a warning to Midway not to try and stop its Pac-Man enhancement (which eventually became one of the biggest-selling arcade games of all time – Ms. Pac-Man).

Curran and McCrae weren't just clever hackers, they had game-design flair and business savvy too. But perhaps above all, they were game fans. So when they received a 5200 development machine they immediately saw all the problems that Atari had missed. GCC thought it could do better. It said it could create a new console that would provide all the new features Atari had been looking for and still be compatible with the 2600. GCC had already proved its abilities as far as Atari's owners were concerned, and the deal was sealed. A bunch of college drop-outs were tasked with designing

"The new console was going to offer graphics at least as good as the 5200, but it would also be compatible with the 2600. And 5200+2600=7800"

›High Score Cart

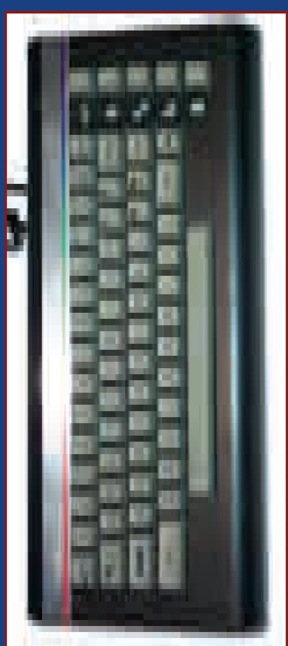
You've just racked up the greatest score ever on Asteroids, but nobody's around to see it. It's the 1980s, so the chances of being able to snap a picture of it with your phone are pretty slim (unlike your phone). So what do you do? You quietly sit back and relax, safe in the knowledge that you had the forethought to attach the High Score Cartridge before you started and the achievement has been preserved for all to marvel at.

The High Score Cartridge had the ability to record the top five best-ever scores for up to 65 different games. It even took the type of controller you'd achieved greatness with into account. As with many things though, this innovative product was cancelled when the Tramiels took over at Atari. Incredibly, thanks to the work of Atari historian Curt Vendel and the original programmer, Gary Rubio, the cartridge was finally completed in 2000 and brought to market in limited numbers. It only works with games that were written specially for it, which is most of the launch titles but none of the later games, due to the project's cancellation. Track one down now – it's the only way to ensure future generations know just how good you were at Centipede.



›Pro Keyboard?

This gadget promised to turn the 7800 console into a home computer. People could have used it as a word processor or to write programs. And what sensible person wouldn't want to use their powerful new games machine to write letters? Had the Tramiels not cancelled the project, it would have shipped with the BASIC programming language and a surprisingly advanced word processor that allowed the user to visually select blocks of text with a joystick or trackball even before this kind of feature was available on 'real' computers. The ProSystem Computer Keyboard wasn't just a novelty, it really would have turned the 7800 into a basic but perfectly viable computer, fully compatible with all Atari 400/800 peripherals (but not software). Though whether it would have been as much as fun as Ms. Pac-Man is another matter altogether.







To improve the sound capabilities of the 7800, games cartridges could come with onboard POKEY sound chips. As it turned out, only Ballblazer and Commando ever took advantage of this

the world's greatest games machine, and saving Atari from financial ruin.

During this whole period Atari had also been in negotiations with Nintendo about a new console. Nintendo thought it might be a wise move to have Atari market its new console, the NES, in the States. Even though Atari had already committed to the 7800 project, it continued to negotiate with Nintendo. This wasn't a backup plan in case the 7800 fell through, it was an attempt to indefinitely delay the NES from launching in the US. Atari hoped to sign a deal with Nintendo and then use it to lock the NES up legally – giving the 7800 free reign in the US market. But the deal was never completed.

Tia Maria

A real sense of excitement was returning to Atari. It had very serious money problems, but it also understood just how good its new product was going to be. The project was officially designated as 'Company Number 1 Priority' and Atari, with its partners at GCC, set about making the 7800 a reality.

The absolutely golden rule was that the new machine had to be 2600 compatible right out of the box. The best way it could ensure 100% compatibility without compromising on the 7800's advanced features was to take the 2600's graphics and sound component, the 'TIA' (Television Interface Adaptor), and place it inside the new console alongside GCC's own much more advanced graphics chip, which became known as 'MARIA'. The TIA would ensure nobody lost their old 2600 collection, while MARIA would allow games designers to get creative with almost 100 independently moving objects, superb colour support, and other brand new features. MARIA was completed within just 12 weeks, but GCC wasn't happy. The chip could display previously unheard of numbers of objects simultaneously, but it couldn't move them around quickly enough. The design had to be improved and GCC quickly added a concept called 'display list lists' which added minimal complication to the architecture but effectively doubled the CPU's available processing time. Sound was to be provided by the 2600 hardware. Though that sounds like a bizarre decision, and GCC's Tom Westberg came to believe it was a mistake, at the time it seemed a reasonable cost-saving measure: the 2600 hardware could be used for simple sound effects and if a game required something more ambitious, a special low-cost sound chip could be built-in to the game's cartridge.

An issue that concerned Atari greatly was unapproved third-party development. It felt too many companies had made too much money from its 2600 console, and had damaged its reputation by releasing poor-quality and occasionally x-rated games. With the 7800 it adopted an encryption system to identify approved cartridges. If a cartridge was successfully authenticated, it was allowed access to the 7800's advanced features. If not, then MARIA would be locked and the console would run as if it was just an Atari 2600.

One final requirement of the new console was that it should grow with the gamer. While earlier consoles had been expanded by attaching devices

"Atari hoped to sign a deal with Nintendo and then use it to lock the NES up legally – giving the 7800 free reign in the US market"

via the cartridge slot, the 7800 would have a special expansion port fully incorporated into the console's design from the beginning. No matter where gaming went in the near future, the 7800 could remain relevant. One initial plan was to use this port to connect an add-on laserdisc system. There would also be some great accessories available for the console's launch – the High Score Cartridge, which would allow players to record their greatest scores, just like the arcade machines did, and the ProSystem Computer Keyboard, which would turn the 7800 into a basic, but perfectly viable, home computer.

A sleek new look was chosen for the console. Rather than something brand new, Atari opted to adapt the case used by the Japanese version of the 2600 (known as Atari 2800). Instead of complex 5200-style analog controllers with far too many buttons, the 7800 would come with simpler two-button sticks. The bundled game would be Pole Position II and the launch price would be around US$150 – half the 5200's launch price.

It was all sounding so promising, but low prices, good looks and impressive hardware don't sell consoles. Games sell consoles, and Atari had been burnt by the lack of quality new games available for the 5200's launch. This mistake was not going to be repeated. This time Atari had 'The Fabulous Eleven', a group of games that promised to show off the 7800's capabilities from day one – enhanced versions of classic arcade games, accurate conversions of recent arcade games, and some entirely original titles. The launch games in full were Ms. Pac-Man, Asteroids, Dig Dug, Joust, Xevious, Desert Falcon, Robotron 2084, Centipede, Fast Food, Galaga, and of course, Pole Position II.

By May 1984 everything was in place. An initial 5,000 machines were waiting to be shipped out. Production facilities were gearing up to make a million more within a year. Atari announced a press conference for May 21st, promising to unveil some exciting new hardware. Nobody was disappointed by what they saw, and the Atari 7800 ProSystem was officially launched a month later at the CES. The games were ready. The hardware was ready. The marketing campaign was ready. Everyone seemed ready for Atari to drag videogames from the depths of despair into an exciting new era. Everyone, that is, except Atari's owners. Having decided it could no longer support Atari's losses, Warner was looking for a way out. And a month later, it found it.

Uncle Jack

Warner decided that its interests would be best served if it split Atari into two separate companies. It would retain ownership of the division that produced arcade games and sell the loss-making home division off to the first buyer who came along, which turned out to be Jack Tramiel.

Jack was an Auschwitz survivor who had moved to the USA in the 1950s and opened a typewriter shop. Always concerned with doing things cheaply, but doing them well he built up his business, founding Commodore and moving into computers with the motto "Computers for the masses, not for the classes". But following the launch of the legendary Commodore 64, Jack had found himself in strong disagreement with Commodore's major shareholder. Jack was never the kind of man to take orders, especially not in the company he had created, and resigned from Commodore. He began to look for somewhere new to pursue his goals and Atari, he thought, was just the place. But there would have to be some serious changes. For a start, they would need to forget about that 7800 ProSystem nonsense...

While the fondly remembered "Power Without The Price" Atari ST led some in the press to refer to him as 'Uncle Jack', many who worked at Atari believed Jack Tramiel to be harsh and single-minded. Consoles were dead. Yesterday's news. The goal for Jack was to beat Commodore to the 16-bit home computer market, and Atari's prized 'Company Number 1 Priority' was standing in his way.

Jack described the 7800 as



The 7800 eventually launched in 1986, and by then the once-groundbreaking technology was beginning to show its age

"pollution", but as it had already been launched, he was prepared to support it, strictly as a sideline if Atari could sell the console for US$50 and the games for US$10. The plan simply didn't leave enough money to go round. And that was fine by Jack. Kevin Curran, CEO of GCC, recalls meeting with Jack to discuss the plan. Jack made it clear that US$50 didn't leave enough money for anyone but him – not even the retailers. He would sell it to K-Mart for US$50, and K-Mart would sell it to the public for US$50. When Kevin questioned how K-Mart would make money, Jack said they could sell socks.

The US$50 plan just wasn't workable but Jack wasn't budging. So even though a few consoles had actually made it into stores, the entire project was cancelled. GCC was grudgingly paid some money to go away, and the 7800 was left to rot in warehouses. The dream of the perfect console was over.

Too little too late

While Atari was focusing on home computers, Nintendo completed the US launch of the NES on its own. It was an outstanding success. Atari's original instincts had been absolutely right – of course people still wanted games consoles, they just had to be good ones. This incredible success persuaded Jack that perhaps there was some money to be made from consoles after all, and the 7800 went back on the agenda.



Just as the 7800 was primed for launch, Jack Tramiel took over Atari's home division and the console was indefinitely shelved

Finally, it was going to be fully launched. But it was going to be launched Jack's way. No big marketing spend, no High Score Cartridge, no keyboard adaptor, no new games, and no pointless expansion port – after all, there were no longer any plans to expand the 7800. Towards the end of 1986, around two and a half years late, the 7800 finally limped into the marketplace, but a lot had changed since 1984. Nintendo had happened. Sega had happened. And Atari had entirely lost its reputation as the top brand in consoles. While the 7800 was technically comparable with the NES, it no longer had the 'wow factor' it would have had in 1984. And while 'The Fabulous Eleven' were still great games, they were no longer the kind of games that got people excited. People wanted the long platform adventures of Super Mario Bros and Metroid, not



The 7800 lives on, thanks to the upcoming Atari Flashback TV game which includes two ProLine-style joysticks and comes with five 7800 titles built-in

the quick blast of Centipede and Galaga.

Yet the machine still sold surprisingly well. It never posed the slightest threat to Nintendo, but evidently the name Atari still meant something to a certain breed of games player. It sold well enough to keep it in production for another four years. Unlike the 5200, the 7800 was eventually launched in Europe, though in a slightly different form – Asteroids was built-in and instead of the original ProLine sticks, two Atari joypads were supplied. The word 'ProSystem' had also been removed from the case in favour of plain old 'Atari 7800'.

As time went on, the NES and Master System were continually relaunched in new bundles and special packs, but Atari never did a single thing to develop the 7800. The package that people could still find in stores as late as 1992 was almost identical to the one that had been put together in 1984. Despite everything, the 7800 sold a respectable million units in the US, though less than 70 games were ever released.

Although Atari survived to release two more consoles, many people believe that the 7800 was its last chance to be a serious contender, and it blew it. The company was in trouble long before Jack Tramiel came along, but had he believed in the 7800 and allowed it to launch as intended in 1984, the history of videogames might have been very different. Atari might still be the world's number one name in games consoles and Sony's most famous product might still be the Walkman. Of course, that's just idle speculation. The only thing we can know for sure is that Atari never got as much right with any other product as it did with this one. If any console ever deserved success, it was the Atari 7800 ProSystem.

›7800 Homebrew

While homebrewers continue to push the 2600 and 5200 to new heights, the 7800 has been largely ignored. Adam Pratt of StaticGamer wants to change all that. We talked to him about the 7800's potential as a hobbyist console and StaticGamer's first 7800 homebrew competition



Retro Gamer: Why do you want to develop a 7800 homebrew scene?

Adam Pratt: I saw developments going on for every other Atari machine and I thought to myself "Why is the 7800 being ignored?" Part of the problem is that the 7800 encryption key wasn't discovered until about four years ago and also, very few development tools exist for it. With these obstacles I felt that a competition was needed to get the ball rolling. Homebrew games on the 2600 and 5200 are very impressive. Hobby developers have shown that the hardware on each machine can be pushed beyond what it was designed to do, and the 7800 has the most powerful and interesting hardware among the 8-bit Atari consoles.

RG: Have there been any early entries to your competition?

AP: Yes, two entries have been submitted so far, but it would be great to see more. One entry was written in C, which is impressive for the 7800. So far I'm offering a rare Vader (all-black) Pro-Line joystick and a 7800 High Score Cartridge as prizes.

RG: Why would someone choose the 7800 for homebrewing?

AP: The main attraction of the 7800 is the mystery. What could it do if it was pushed hard enough? What kind of original games could be made? The 7800 is the underdog of the Atari consoles and I always find myself backing the underdog. I really enjoy the new 2600 titles and can imagine what it would be like if the same efforts were made for the 7800. People who program these consoles have to be more creative because of the limitations. Thus, playing homebrew titles on the older systems is an experience you won't find on any modern console.

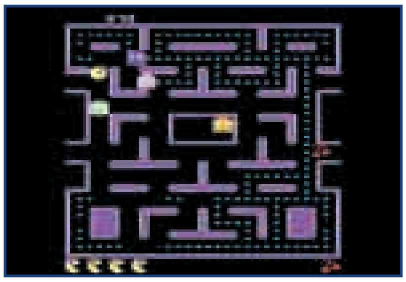
RG: How can people get involved and enter your competition?

AP: On the page for the contest I have at StaticGamer (**www.staticgamer.com**) you can find several useful links as well as tools. You can contact some programmers who know their way around the 7800 well enough to answer questions and offer tools – a few new tools have been released recently. Download EMU7800 so you have an environment to test your programs. Beginners should first try a hack of an existing game – hacks will also be accepted for the contest.

›The Fabulous Eleven

Atari commissioned a line-up of games, consisting mainly of arcade conversions, which became known as "The Fabulous Eleven". But were they really that fabulous? Here are six of the stand-out launch games

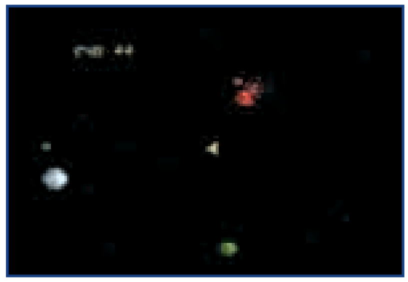




Ms. Pac-Man

Ms. Pac-Man took the original concept of Pac-Man and added speed and variety to an ageing classic. It worked extremely well, both in the arcades and on the 7800. The two versions are impressively close. Only the slightly blockier look and somewhat inferior sound separate them, but neither detract from an almost perfect translation of the game itself – the 7800 retains all the speed and features that made the original great.





Asteroids

By 1984 Asteroids was hardly cutting edge, so it should have been easy for Atari to create a truly authentic conversion. But it didn't. Instead, it took the concept of Asteroids and made it worthy of the 7800. The aim is still the same, but now the asteroids are solid, detailed and animated, and everything moves along faster than ever, with a simultaneous two-player mode adding a whole new dimension. This arcade conversion isn't perfect – it's much better than that.





Dig Dug

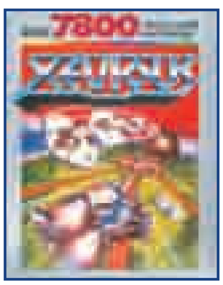
Games aren't what they used to be. Sure, today there are plenty of first-person shooters to satisfy that basic need for mindless violence, but what about those occasions when all you want to do is harpoon the bad guy and pump air into him until he explodes? You've no choice but to return to games like Dig Dug. And on the 7800, that's no bad thing. The 7800 graphics have lost just a little of the arcade original's charm, but the gameplay has survived in tact. Another excellent conversion.





Joust

If old arcade games didn't move so fast, you might have time to stop and wonder why you're playing the part of a knight flying around on an ostrich and attempting to capture eggs from your opponents. Perhaps we're best not knowing. But what is worth knowing is that this classic lost none of its appeal in the 7800 translation. Any version of Joust lives or dies by how well the programmers have managed to replicate the arcade version's control system. And here, they've done an excellent job.





Xevious

It's the future and the Xevions are invading, intending to reclaim the Earth. And it looks like the no-good peace-niks finally got their way as it seems the entire planet has just one defence craft – and you get to fly it. Xevious was among the best vertical scrollers in the arcade, and once again, the 7800 conversion is excellent. The graphics and sound don't quite match the original, but the gameplay has come across untarnished.



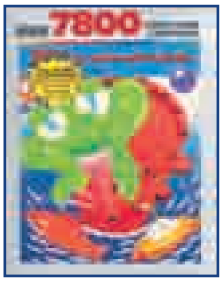


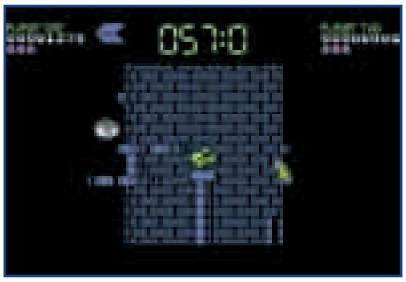
Galaga

In the movie *War Games*, Matthew Broderick liked to spend his time playing this arcade game. If he'd had a 7800 at home then maybe he would have just kept on playing Galaga instead of starting World War III, because this is another quality conversion. It's not arcade perfect – the graphics have been scaled down a little and the difficulty curve has changed, but everything from the swooping aliens to the treacherous tractor beam is right here.

›Best of the Rest

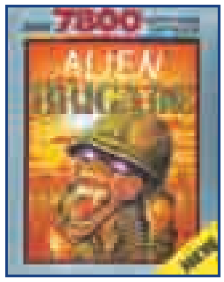
Although there were less than 70 commercial releases for the Atari 7800, the game catalogue is surprisingly wide ranging. As a taster of what was available, here are six highly recommended titles

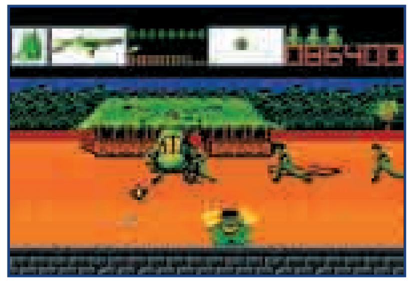




Tower Toppler

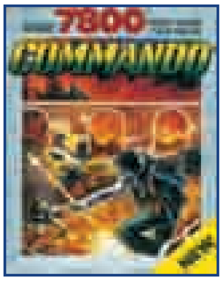
There's a back story about ecosystems, but all you really need to know is that a frog has to get to the top of a tower, and get there quickly. Part puzzler, part action platformer, this game is visually outstanding – your character never physically moves as you climb. Instead, the tower rotates around you in a lovely effect, and the underwater scenes are a joy to see. The gameplay doesn't disappoint either, with just the right platform/puzzle mix. All 7800 owners should get this.





Alien Brigade

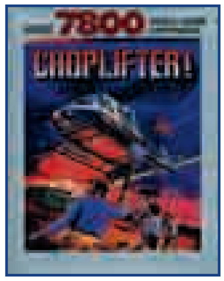
Some mind-bending aliens have turned an army brigade on their own people in their attempt to defeat them. And as usual, only one person is available to take care of business... An atmospheric opening sequence sets the scene for this superior first-person, horizontally scrolling shooter, playable with joystick or light gun. The visuals are well above par, the music is great by 7800 standards, and the gameplay is perfectly balanced between suspense and frantic action.

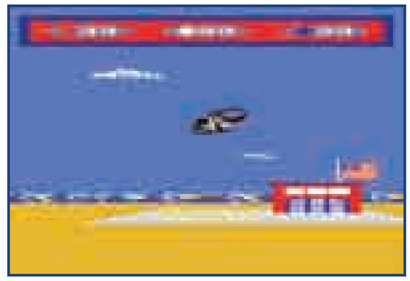




Commando

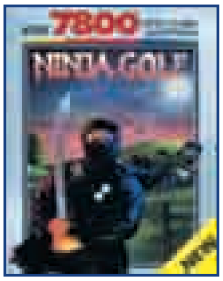
Your daughter's been kidnapped. And although you're armed and dangerous, several thousand equally well armed bad guys stand between you and her safe return. So it's probably just as well that you have multiple lives and the uncanny ability to run at the same speed as your enemy's bullets. It mightn't be realistic, but Commando is among the 7800's best games. The graphics aren't particularly special but don't detract from the fun of this non-stop carnage.





Choplifter

Nothing's more dangerous than a rescue mission behind enemy lines. No allies and no backup. Just one attack helicopter struggling against all the odds to bring the hostages home alive. There's air fire to deal with and the ground is crawling with tanks. Just flying the helicopter is time consuming enough. Choplifter is a superb action game that borrows a few ideas from Defender, but adds enough originality to create a whole new, wonderfully entertaining game.





Ninja Golf

So the rival systems had ninja games and golf games, but they sure as hell didn't have any golfing ninja games. The 7800 did. It starts like a normal, if somewhat basic, golf game – aim, set the strength, hit the ball... and then it all gets a little strange. You can't stroll gently to your next stroke. Instead you must fight your way there through an unrelenting series of attacks from rival ninjas. Despite all the odds, this novelty game is surprisingly engrossing.





Scrapyard Dog

Atari's golden age was built upon death and destruction – if it moves, kill it. This game sounds like it should fit right in – stomp on the bad guys and survive the city slums. But as soon as you start to play, you know it's from a time when the world was being 'Nintendoed'. It's all cutesy graphics and cutesy gameplay. Never have street gangs looked so cuddly. It's a fairly blatant copy of Super Mario Bros, and while it lacks mindless violence, it's still very playable.

›Steve Golson Interview

Steve Golson and his friends were college drop-outs. They'd secured places at MIT but when they should have been studying, Steve and his friends at GCC were busy manipulating major corporations, enhancing arcade games, and designing the Atari 7800. Today Steve works for Trilobyte Systems as a freelance chip designer and, with additional input from principal designer Tom Westberg, he took the time to tell us about the technical aspects of the Atari 7800



Retro Gamer: What exactly was Atari looking for in the 7800?

Steve Golson: We had a contract with Warner Communications, which owned Atari, rather than with Atari directly. So if we came up with something cool, we just convinced our buddies at Warner that it was great, and Warner would convince Atari. Originally what Warner asked for was a '2600 with more players'. The 2600 used what were called 'player/missile graphics' where there is dedicated hardware for each player and missile graphical object. So the idea was to double up the logic and get spiffier graphics, while retaining compatibility.

RG: Did you have to make any compromises to ensure complete 2600 compatibility?

SG: Staying compatible with 2600 forced us to use a 6502 microprocessor, though there was some thought given to using a different processor and emulating 6502, but that didn't go far. I don't think it was much of a limitation given what else was available. It helped that we were able to run at a faster clock in 7800 mode, and slow back down in 2600 mode.

Tom Westberg: Compatibility was made fairly simple by including the old 2600 graphics chip. We then used that for sound to save cost, which was probably a mistake.

RG: Where do you start when you're designing a new console?

SG: Lots of sketches on whiteboards. Lots of brainstorming. The basics of the MARIA chip were figured out fairly quickly, building on some of the work from our own games machine project, and our work designing arcade graphics. MARIA went from nothing to tapeout in about 12 weeks, but it wasn't quite enough – you could display lots of objects, but it required too much time from the 6502 processor. So we immediately started working on a second version, MARIA II, which is what went into production. The original chip had 'display lists' of graphics objects, which were automatically displayed on each scan line by DMA hardware that copied the graphics data into the line RAM. Every scan line required the processor to update the display list info. MARIA II added 'display list lists' which was a further level of indirection – now MARIA could take care of updating the display lists after every scan line, and the CPU had lots more free time. You need all the free time you can get when you're using a 1.8MHz 8-bit processor.

RG: Did the fact that Atari wanted encryption to lock-out unapproved cartridges add many complications?

SG: When the 7800 powers up, it has an onboard boot ROM that figures out what sort of cart is plugged in. If it's a 7800 cart then it locks into MARIA graphics mode and transfers control to the cart. If it's not a 7800 cart, then it locks into 2600/TIA graphics mode. So you have some sort of checksum or signature that identifies a 7800 cart. Now if you encrypt the checksum with a public-key scheme, you can have authentication that the cart is 'official'. The encryption complicated the development process but it wasn't a big deal. The major problem was keeping the encryption key secret. We *never* gave it to Atari, because it couldn't keep secrets. We gave it to Warner.

RG: Could you describe the 7800 games development process for us?

SG: It was generally small teams – one or two people per game. Some general development work was shared by all – we had some sound/music specialists. Development was done on prototype 7800 machines using 6502 microprocessor emulators. Lots of our work was porting arcade titles to the home platforms, so you needed one of the arcade machines that you had to play *a lot*. Once the game was playable we had an official test squad who exercised the games while they videotaped the screen. They kept notes on any bugs or funny glitches.

RG: Despite being an earlier console, the 7800 went up against the NES and Master System in the market. How did it measure up?

TW: Graphically, the 7800 is probably a bit better than the NES, but not quite up to the standard of the Master System. In terms of sound, it was behind both. More importantly, Nintendo was driving a new approach to videogaming – "I paid for this cart, so it's good if the game lasts a long time" – while we were all addicts to the quarter-grabbing philosophy of arcade games. The 7800 could implement an arcade game better than the NES, but Nintendo wasn't trying that; it didn't do Donkey Kong over and over. Instead it did Mario platform games.

RG: And how did you, the designers, feel when it became clear that Atari was no longer interested in releasing the 7800?

SG: We were very disappointed, to say the least. We thought we had a great system, with amazing games, and I think it would have been a huge success, despite Atari's problems. Conventional wisdom at the time was that videogames were dead. What no one realised was that there would be a whole new crop of eight-year-old kids every year, willing to play games. The NES took over a market that had been abandoned by everyone else, so it won by default.

eMag



THE HISTORY OF STAR WARS VIDEOGAMES

EPISODE II

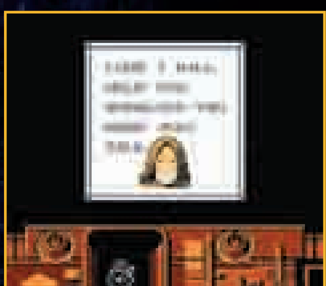
LUCASARTS STRIKES BACK

Last issue we looked at the period we'll call the Old Republic, back when 8-bit Jedi Knights kept the gaming world safe from scum and villainy. That brought us up to 1987, when Domark ported Atari's wire-frame arcade classics to every home computer in the known galaxy. As Dan Whitehead discovers, 1987 also marked the beginning of a new era in Star Wars gaming. Although we didn't know it at the time…

While we were prodding away at rubber keys and trying to find the optimum cassette volume at which to load Sabre Wulf, over in Japan they were getting very excited about a new console from popular Game & Watch makers Nintendo – the Famicom.

It was on this fledgling system that arcade stalwart Namco released its own take on George Lucas' galaxy far, far away. As the game was never released outside Japan, it's one of the few commercially available Star Wars games to have gone largely unseen by fans. Even today, the original cartridge is something of a rarity.

The game itself is a mixed bag. As far as gameplay goes, it's pretty cool and serves up side-scrolling platform action, the first ever use of this in a Star Wars game. Up until this point, the games always focussed on vehicular combat, so just being able to see and control recognisable characters like Luke Skywalker was something of a novelty.



Very much in the Mario vein, you proceed from left to right, jumping over conveniently step-shaped rocky obstacles and using your lightsaber to kill the various baddies along the way. Each enemy only takes one hit to kill, but as the same is true of Luke you can't really complain that it isn't hard enough. In fact, as the game progresses it's easy to run out of your meagre allocation of lives when confronted with a tricky jump or an awkwardly placed Tusken Raider.

Graphically, it was certainly the most faithful adaptation of the time. Stormtroopers, R2-D2, and even Darth Vader himself are all instantly recognisable. The game also avoids the Japanese tendency towards the cute 'super-deformed' big head look, making its non-appearance on Western shores all the more mysterious.

Where the game does stumble slightly is in its adherence (or lack thereof) to the *Star Wars* storyline. The action starts on Tatooine, understandably enough. You see some Jawas swipe R2 and Luke set off in pursuit. OK, so that's not strictly true to the movie (and Luke's wispy, blonde 70s barnet has been dyed black) but we're still in the realms of artistic licence. Things start to go a bit bandy when you enter the Jawa Sandcrawler to find an unarmed Imperial stormtrooper marching up and down. When you climb into the attic of the craft and find Darth Vader waiting for you, alarm bells start to ring. And when he transforms into a huge scorpion with a human face… well, it's safe to say that we're through the looking glass.

Despite its weirdness, the Japanese game was something of a template for the Star Wars games released well into the nineties. Up until Namco's game, it had been all X-wings and snowspeeders, but for the next eight years the platformer was where it was at.

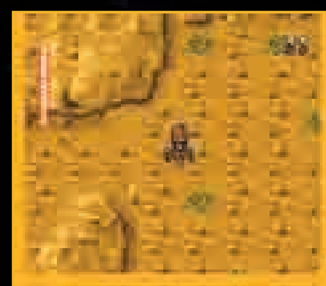
Easy as JVC

Of course, Western gamers wouldn't be aware of this change until several years later. In 1991, JVC finally published a Star Wars game for the US version of the Famicom, now re-branded with the less effeminate title of NES, or Nintendo Entertainment System.

Superficially similar to the Namco release, the Western version of this game was developed by LucasArts (then Lucasfilm Games) and blends the predictable side-on jumping action with some role-playing adventure elements and a little bit of top-down exploration. Zipping around the sands of Tatooine in a landspeeder, you must explore various caves in order to find R2 and get the whole adventure rolling. So far, so familiar, but Luke isn't the only playable character in this version. As the story goes on, you are able to control Han, Leia and Obi-Wan, while C-3PO and R2 can be used for hints and assistance. In fact, if you don't rescue R2, you can't get Obi-Wan to join your party. This sort of RPG element really helps the game feel true to the movie and the simplistic platform appearance conceals a rather clever little game.

Of course, it's not all good news. For one thing, Darth Vader doesn't appear in the game at all. Nor does Chewbacca, but then he was a mere sidekick. Producing a game without a lead villain – one of the most iconic villains in movie history, no less – was a much bolder decision. The game is also skewed towards the tougher end of the play scale, with some annoying pixel-perfect jumps unfairly diminishing your stock of lives.

Star Wars was a strong seller and was also rolled out across three other formats, including a version for the Sega Master System, which was almost identical to the NES original, to later handheld editions for both the GameBoy and GameGear.





Namco's original Star Wars game for the NES – surprisingly good and highly sought after by fans



Star Wars was a strong platformer for the NES, complete with basic RPG elements

›System Wars

By the early 90s, Star Wars and the SNES had quite a cosy little alliance going in the Great Console War, but 1993 saw US Gold cross the battle lines to release a port of the NES Star Wars game on the Sega Master System. Only released in Europe, the adaptation (handled by Tiertex) actually improved on the original in several ways – it featured improved visuals, as the Master System offered a subtler colour palette and better digitised images of the characters in the films. With the SNES and Megadrive dragging gaming into the warm glow of 16-bit heaven though, the Master System was already a dying format – hence the Europe-only release for the title.

Back to basics

So successful was the Star Wars game that The Empire Strikes Back swiftly followed the next year. This all but ditches the RPG elements of the previous game, slight though they were, and concentrates on delivering a stronger platform game with some nifty vehicle sections to boot. Opening on Hoth, the game follows the movie almost scene for scene (if you pretend that Mark Hamill does a lot of jumping up and down) – you ride your tauntaun, see Obi-Wan's spirit, battle the wampa monster (several of them, actually) and make your way back to the rebel base. You don't get to snooze in tauntaun guts, but hey, you can't have everything.

The game engine is much the same as the one used for Star Wars, but the levels are better designed and there's a feeling of progress that isn't as noticeable in the first game.

Things switch to vehicle action for – you guessed it – the AT-AT attack. There are various ways to bring down these metal monsters (blast them from behind or fire your harpoons at their feet) and this was a logical improvement on the old Atari coin-op rendition of the same scene. As the NES graphics chip was being squeezed for all it was worth, the end result looks pretty spectacular too.

The game then takes you to Dagobah (and even features the encounter with the phantom Vader) via a quick space battle with TIE Fighters. Then it's on to Darth Vader's ship (rather than Bespin), where you battle Boba Fett, enjoy a quick cameo from Lando and endure an epic fight with the real Darth Vader that traverses many screens and ends – in a franchise-destroying sort of way – with Vader being impaled on spikes.

While there's no denying that the game is fun and looks great for a NES title, it does suffer from the switch of focus to just Luke. The rest of the characters are reduced to little more than bit parts, and after the ensemble effort of the first JVC title, that's a shame.

You'd be forgiven for expecting Return of the Jedi to put in an appearance as well, but the 16-bit era was dawning and the decision was made to simply start afresh on the new technology. Once again, the final chapter of the story was dealt a bum hand as far as games were concerned.

Super powered

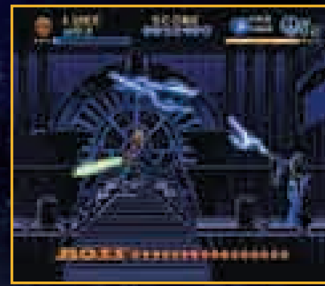
In 1991, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System debuted in America, and it was clear that continuing the Star Wars saga on the clunky old NES while the Sega Genesis mopped up the 16-bit market was out of the question. As a result, Super Star Wars – once again developed by Lucasfilm and published by JVC – was one of the first SNES games to be released, debuting in early 1992. It was also one of the first to really show off the potential of Nintendo's new wonder beast.

As the name suggests, Super Star Wars was a remake of the NES original, but was substantially beefed up in every respect. From the stereo renditions of John Williams' iconic themes (finally sounding like they are being played on actual instruments rather than digital watches) to the large colourful sprites, which leap and roll around parallax-scrolling levels with lifelike animation, this is about as glamorous as Star Wars games ever got.

As in the NES version, the game starts out with Luke on Tatooine beating up Jawas and assorted desert beasts. As the game progresses you meet up with characters like Han and Chewie and can choose which character to use in each level as you plot your course to the Death Star. Apart from a slight increase in resilience for those opting to go Wookiee, the decision is purely cosmetic. The game also features an attempt at a 3D space section, which includes the final trench run – this made early use of the SNES Mode 7 chip to shift the graphics around.

The game also inherits its ancestors' fussy difficulty levels and it's likely that most gamers never find the other characters or get to try the vehicle sections. One particular part of the game, in which Luke tries to scale the side of a sandcrawler by leaping from moving platforms, deserves to go down in history as one of the most joypad-smashing feats of programming.

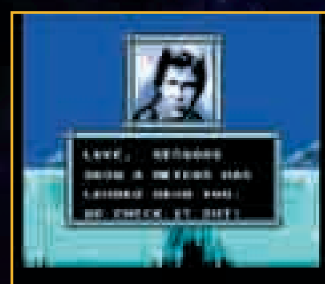
The game also hurls wave upon wave of respawning enemies at the player, making it more of a side-scrolling shooter than a pure platformer, so standing still for any length of time is suicidal. Apparently the developer realised that it may have tipped things a little too far towards 'rock hard' on the difficulty scale, as practically every enemy drops a health power-up when killed. The result is a game in which your health bar yo-yos up and down as you march relentlessly from left to right, finger firmly pressed on the fire button.



While ambitious, Super Return of the Jedi is the weakest of the SNES Star Wars trilogy

In 1993, the second instalment of JVC's new trilogy, The Empire Strikes Back, was released, which leapt towards full-on 'Super' mode. Perhaps wisely, this game didn't mess with the winning formula established by Super Star Wars – big colourful sprites and non-stop action are the key ingredients here. Deviating from the NES Empire game, this edition drops the Luke-centric gameplay, giving Han a look in on the action as well.

If the game has one failing (apart from yet another ridiculously steep difficulty curve)





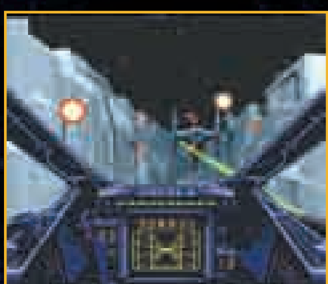
Empire was the last Star Wars game for the NES, as LucasArts turned its attention toward the new Super Nintendo



it's that the locations are dragged out over lengthy levels – Hoth alone takes you up to level 12. After that, you get to enjoy the good ol' AT-AT battle in glorious Mode 7, but you need to be a pretty stubborn gamer (or a cheater) to get that far. One important addition to Super Empire Strikes Back is the password system that lets you return to where you were up to. Considering the length and difficulty of the games, this is more than welcome.

Third time unlucky

The LucasArts/JVC trilogy was finally completed in 1995, with the release of the slightly disappointing Super Return of the Jedi. It wasn't in the same lowly league as Atari's clumsy isometric 1984 arcade machine, but even so, a sense of formula was creeping in and some unusual gameplay choices had been made that compounded the 'been there, done that' feeling.



For one thing, the game starts with a scrolling Mode 7 vehicle level that doesn't seem to bear any reference to the movie. Presumably meant to illustrate Luke's journey to Jabba's palace, this fussy race sequence in what looks like an upside-down satellite sees you leaping over mysterious black voids, collecting tokens and being bounced around by irritating little pillars of rock. Pointless and aggravating, the fact that it has no relevance to *Star Wars* means you start the game feeling peeved rather than excited or challenged.

Once you've got past that irritation, the game's technically a steady improvement on the previous two. Faster paced and with much smoother control, it's an eyeball-searing experience. You can also choose from three characters to play as (Luke, Chewie and Leia in her bounty hunter disguise), as you make your way to Jabba's palace. However, the hectic gameplay is also combined with sprawling level design in which missing a platform means you fall down to... more platforms beneath. As you sprint from left to right, collecting tokens (another new addition), it's hard to avoid the sensation that you're playing Sonic the Jedi or something similar.



Star Wars on the SNES concluded with a 3D Death Star trench run (top), while Empire ended with a deadly lightsaber duel with Vader (above)

Even the presence of some giant boss encounters – such as with the Rancor monster – and a Mode 7 speederbike chase on Endor can't hide the fact that this is a pretty dumb game. Few of the enemies are taken from the films and generic creatures jump, roll and run into you constantly. Like the much-maligned movie, it feels like it's pandering to an easily distracted audience at the expense of franchise continuity. As if to prove this thesis correct, Super Return of the Jedi allows you to play as an Ewok. A bloody Ewok.

The game climaxes in a rather bizarre boss battle with the Emperor, who flies around the screen like the demon from Ghosts 'n' Goblins and blasts the walkway out from underneath you. If you defeat him – which is practically impossible, since your health's dwindling and you're running out of surfaces to stand on – you move on to one of the most ill-conceived final levels in a game. Ever.

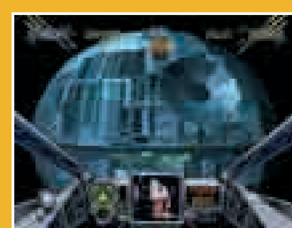
In one of the worst uses of Mode 7 in SNES history, the game attempts to recreate the Millenium Falcon's journey into the heart of the second Death Star from a first-person perspective. In reality, this is just a series of blocky geometric shapes jerking towards you, while the occasional TIE fighter floats past. Hitting the sides damages your shields, but as you can't really tell where the sides are, it's a confusing challenge to say the least. Aiming for the black bit in the middle of the screen seems to work, but that gets smaller and smaller (presumably because the tunnel is getting narrower, though you'd be hard pushed to tell from the graphics) until you reach the reactor. Blow that up and you've finished one of the hardest and most annoying Star Wars games.

Super Return of the Jedi's flaws are made all the more noticeable because the 'Super' trilogy is still the most complete and graphically impressive rendition of the saga, even today. It also marks the last time companies used the classic movie trilogy as a basis for our videogame entertainment. From that point on, games makers would step outside the confines of what George Lucas had put on screen and explore the galaxy on their own...

›Star Wars Arcade

Although the Star Wars gaming franchise had radically evolved after spreading to home consoles, Sega realised that Atari's wire-frame arcade titles were still extremely popular with fans of the movie. So, taking the licence right back to its X-wing-flying roots, Sega released Star Wars Arcade. Featuring fantastic 3D visuals and a *huge* sit-down cabinet, Star Wars Arcade put you in the seat of an X-wing (and a Y-wing) and featured missions taken from the original movie trilogy – most of these were simple 'destroy all enemies' affairs, while others took place on and around the Death Star, reproducing Luke's epic trench run.

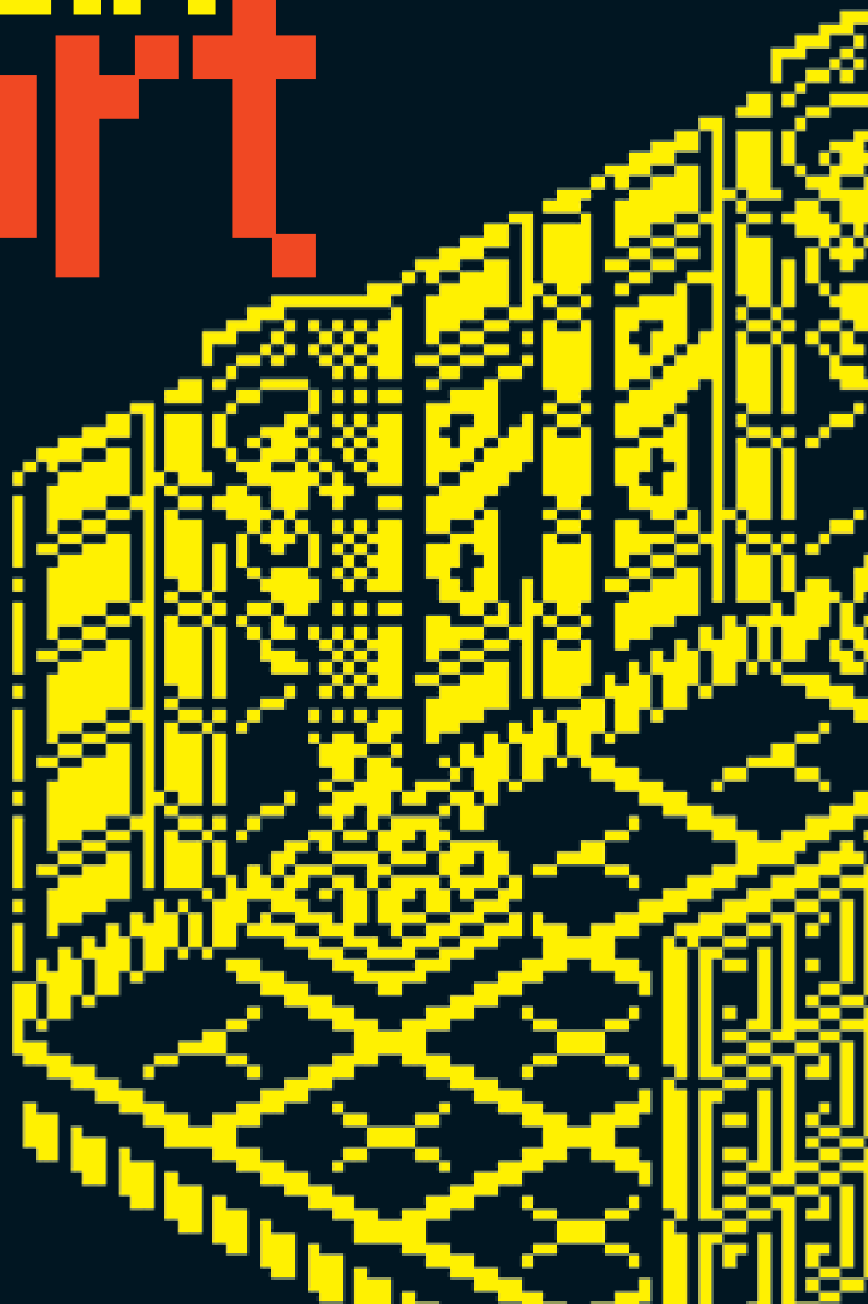
On the home console front, the Megadrive wasn't equipped to handle the power of Star Wars Arcade, so the game eventually arrived on the ill-advised Megadrive add-on, the 32X. Along with only a couple of other 3D titles, like Virtua Racing and Doom, Star Wars Arcade was one of the few reasons to own a 32X.



NEXT MONTH
The History of Star Wars Videogames Episode III: X-wing, Rebel Assault and Dark Forces games on PC

The Ritman Report

Everybody knows Jon Ritman for Match Day, Batman and Head Over Heels – three 8-bit classics of their time and fondly remembered to this day. With an excellent Head Over Heels remake appearing recently and Jon currently working on a brand new title for the rapidly growing mobile phone market, we decided it was time to investigate further and revisit a few more of those Ritman-powered gems from yesteryear. Alex Carroll does the digging...

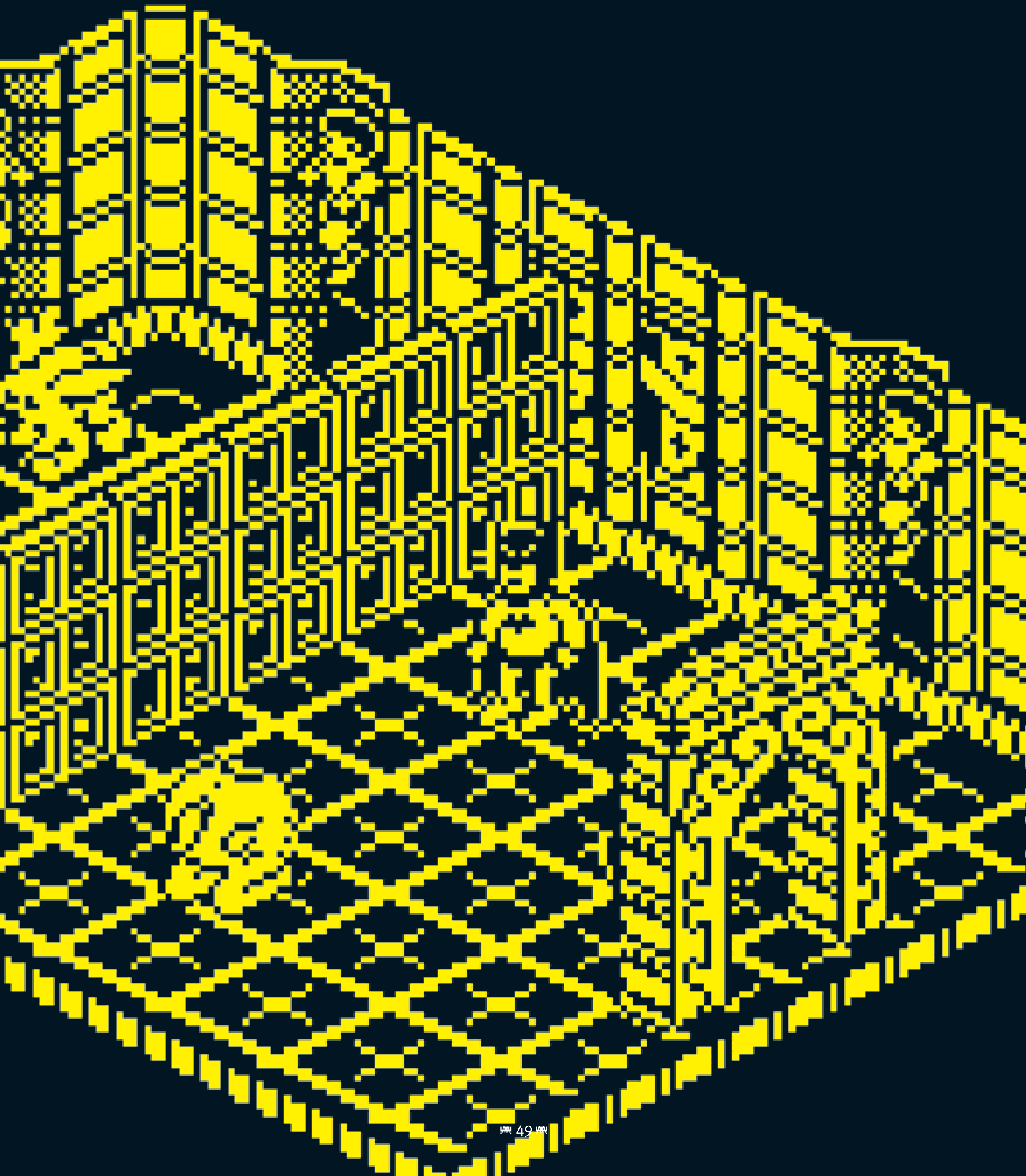


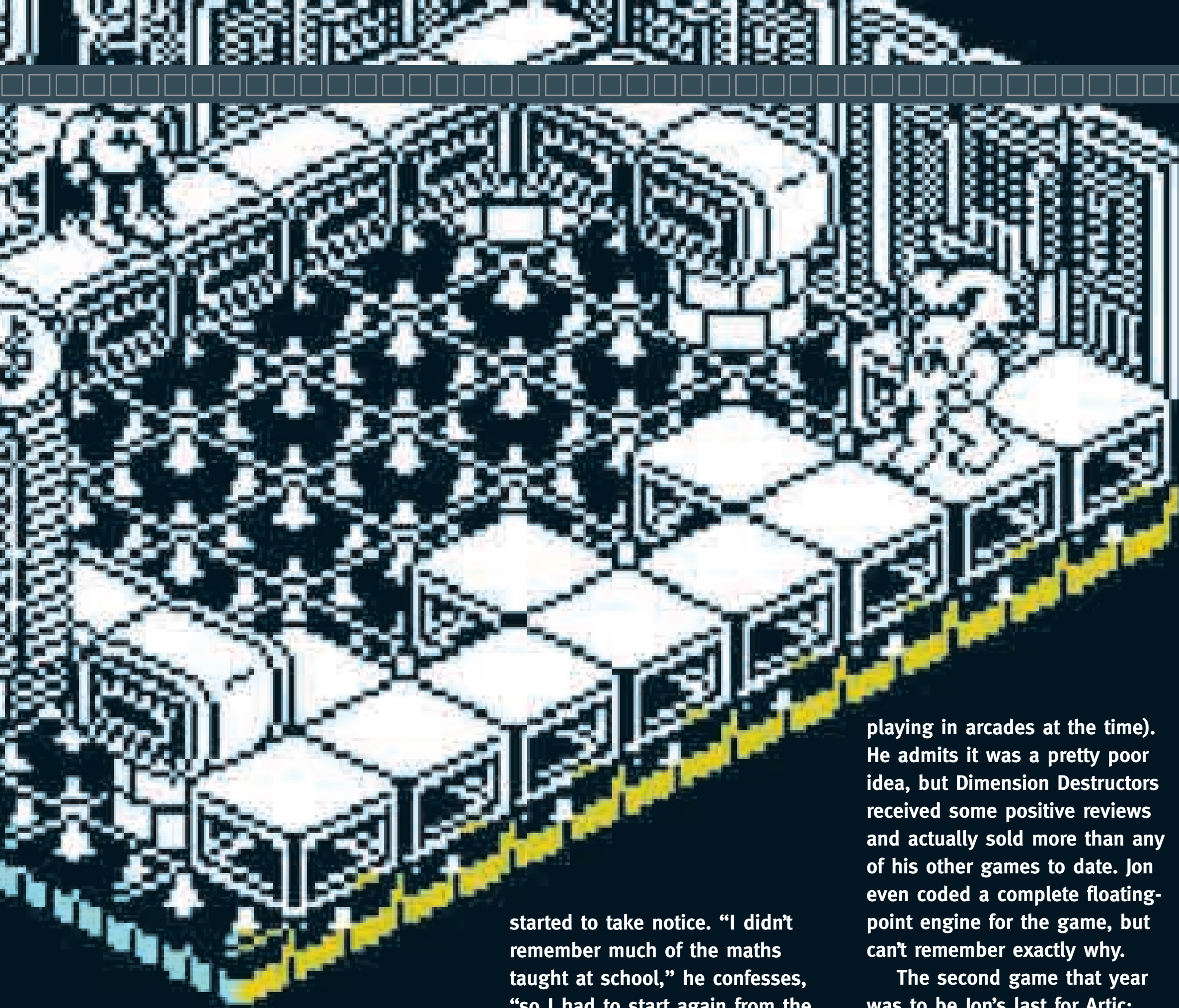
Unlike his good friend Sandy White, Jon didn't find immediate fame with his first title. In fact, there are few today who remember Namtir Raiders, his first game (released in 1981), although that doesn't necessarily mean it was bad. In fact, Jon looks on it more as part of a learning curve, having done everything himself including the graphics and sound. "It was just an attempt to find anything to program having just learnt how," he readily admits. Based squarely on a coin-op he saw in the corner of his local pub, the entire game was hand coded into Hex for the ZX81 ("the best machine I could afford at the time") whilst he worked as a TV repairman. Jon sent Namtir Raiders to Artic Computing who immediately snapped up the game and he was on his way.

His next game, Cosmic Debris for the Spectrum, was actually Jon's second Spectrum game, but he doesn't really count the "truly crap" (his words) Space Invaders clone that he initially coded for the machine. Cosmic Debris was a homage to Asteroids, a game Jon was very fond of, and went on to sell around 5,000 copies, garnering some decent reviews along the way. *Crash* featured the game in its 'Living Guide to Asteroids', calling it "an archetypal Asteroids game with hardly any colour at all" and criticising it for not supporting popular joysticks. Jon used Artic's own assembler programs to code the game, which was a great improvement on the Bug-Byte application used for ZX81 titles.

During this period, Jon was still working for Radio Rentals and coding in his spare time. It's difficult to imagine anyone having the time to write software full time, let alone in evenings and weekends, so when Jon came up with 3D Combat Zone, a clone of Battle Zone but written entirely from scratch, people







started to take notice. "I didn't remember much of the maths taught at school," he confesses, "so I had to start again from the basics of trigonometry – it all seemed quite easy now I had something to use it for." Anyone who has ever tried to code the most basic of 3D objects without flashy APIs or development kits will relate to how Jon felt sitting staring at his first rotating wire-frame cube for hours. 3D Combat Zone earned some good reviews and sold around 6,000 copies.

In 1983, Artic released two more games by Jon. The first was another 3D game, Dimension Destructors, which was his first attempt at producing his own game idea from scratch (although it bears a slight resemblance to Atari's Star Wars coin-op that was playing in arcades at the time). He admits it was a pretty poor idea, but Dimension Destructors received some positive reviews and actually sold more than any of his other games to date. Jon even coded a complete floating-point engine for the game, but can't remember exactly why.

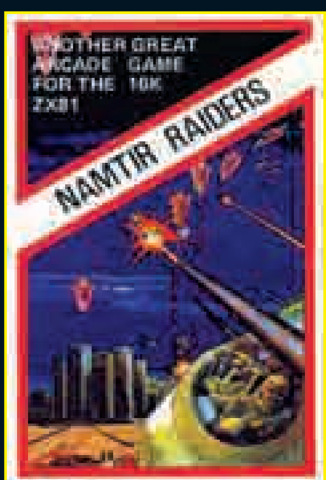
The second game that year was to be Jon's last for Artic: Bear Bovver. Always aware of what everyone else was releasing, and with one eye on Ultimate's Pssst and the other on Bally's BurgerTime, Jon decided it was time for something a little cuter. Bear Bovver features the gameplay of BurgerTime combined with a story based on Sinclair's misguided ventures into the electric car market. Jon spent a considerable amount of time coding the game to avoid the two-colours-per-block limit enforced by the Spectrum, and the result was an incredibly smooth-looking game, full of animation and life. During the development of Bear Bovver, Jon left Radio Rentals to work for Artic full time, but when the publishers struggled with getting the game onto the shelves (despite some clever marketing in the games press at the time), Jon and Artic went their separate ways, leaving Jon free to talk to other publishers. This lead to a very important chance meeting with Ocean Software.

Game on

Before we go on, we should get one thing out of the way: Jon had nothing to do with any of the inferior ports of Match Day to other machines. In fact, the various conversions were produced without any contact with Jon whatsoever, and it's clear to everyone that the Spectrum version was easily the best. "The Amstrad version was OK, the C64 less so," he says. He didn't receive royalties however, so it wasn't all bad.

The history of the game is interesting. It's one of those 80s computer game-folklore stories that has stood the test of time, and has more to do with Bear Bovver than you might think. Jon was attending one of the many computer shows at the time (which were massively popular during the 80s) and was speaking to various distributors about the sort of games they'd like to see on the Spectrum. The feedback Jon got was that everyone wanted to see a new version of International Soccer (which was currently enjoying great success on the C64), so as soon as he got home from the show, he started writing it.

Unlike most developer/ publisher relationships, Jon only











Pre-Match Day round-up. Jon's five games for Artic

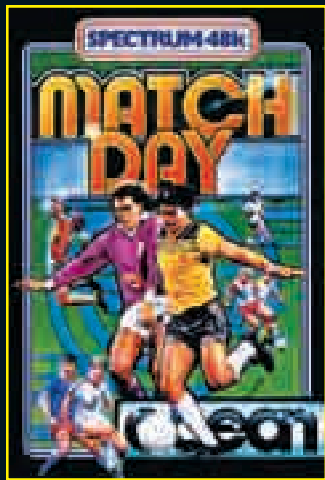
ever approached the men with chequebooks once he'd finished (or nearly finished) whatever game he was working on. Match Day was no different, and up until the next chance he had to visit another show, he was busy converting the bear from Bear Bovver into a human footballer, making a start on his rival to International Soccer. Excitedly, we ask if he still has any of the early bear/human hybrid sketches. "I never did sketches," he tells us, "I just worked directly on the Speccy – and no, I don't have any old stuff that goes that far back."

At a show, as Artic was showing off its new football game, Jon made a bold claim to Ocean's David Ward that his game would be better: "A thousand times better." And then went back to coding.

Obviously that chance meeting left an impression on David Ward (who Jon describes as "a very funny man, I can still remember him trundling around his office singing the Batman theme when we first suggested doing it"), because nine months later he called Jon and asked if he had finished the game he was boasting about. It was almost complete, and much to Jon's surprise that was enough to convince Ocean to offer him plenty of cash and a publishing deal. The rest, as Jon is fond of saying, "is history".

"I had seen International Soccer many times in shop windows and just made something that had some resemblance," he says, adamant that he didn't aim to exactly copy the C64 hit. "As it turned out, when I finally played International Soccer some time later, I found it to be very different to play. In the end I just did it by feel."

We ask Jon about the coding experience, because Match Day was the first time he had shared the responsibilities and worked with another programmer on a game. He tells us that Chris Clarke worked solely on the front end, while he was responsible for the graphics and game. The two aspects were therefore very separate, so there doesn't appear to be much to say. He does, however, share a little on the player AI: "It was scary. I can remember putting off coding it until there was nothing else to do. Then sticking in a few lines that worked as follows:





Match Day was Jon's first multiformat game, appearing on the Spectrum, C64, Amstrad CPC and BBC Micro

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Question: Have you got
the ball?
If 'Yes' then kick it up
the field;
Else run at the ball;
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"It scored against me in about 10 seconds and I was crying with laughter and relief. Of course, it was developed beyond that but it's those few lines I remember."

Match Day went on to sell over five times more than any of his previous games, at least 50,000 copies (at full price, too) and then just as many again when it was re-released on The Hit Squad budget label. It also appeared on the They Sold a Million II compilation pack. The game garnered critical success too, receiving many fantastic reviews. Match Day might not have sold a million, but the game gave Jon a huge boost of confidence – things could only get better from there.

Next up to bat...

As the master tape for Match Day was handed over to Ocean, Jon saw Ultimate's seminal Knight Lore for the first time. He had seen Sandy White's Ant Attack (arguably the first isometric game ever created) and although he was impressed "by the whole Ant Attack system, it didn't have the graphics that made Knight Lore so jaw-droppingly fantastic." Knight Lore was a huge inspiration to Jon – he wanted to make a similar game, "almost like a Disney film that you could control." He introduced his cartoonist friend Bernie Drummond to a computer and left him to come up with some ideas for characters.

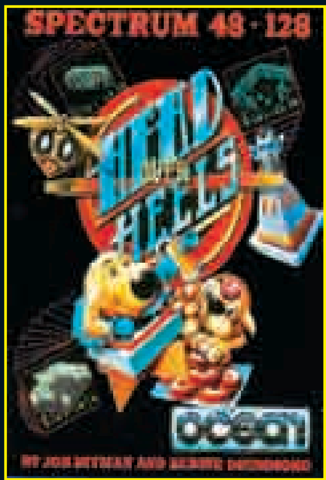
Initial sessions seemed a waste of time. "Bernie created what looked like a random mess of dots with no sign that he knew where he was going," recalls Jon, and then the cartoonist suddenly created what looked like the outline of an eye. "He went from crazy doodler to craftsman instantly, sculpting a matching eye and then an entire character – it was without doubt one of the best bits of game art I had ever seen." The final character was dubbed Budweiser, and as a note of respect is the first non-playable character you meet in Batman.

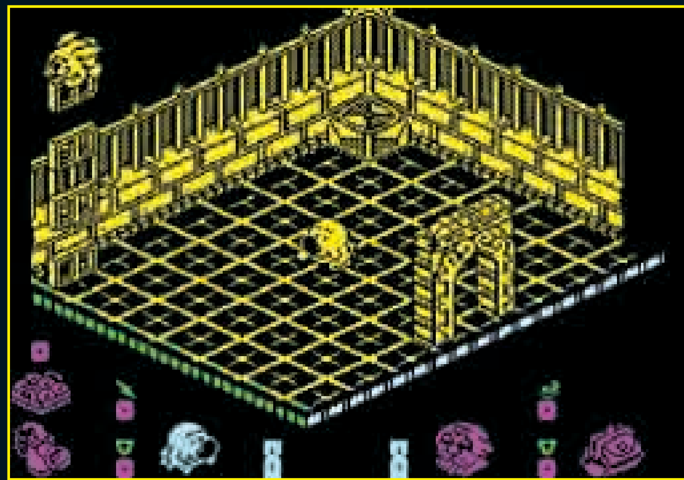
However, they were still without a defined character – the game needed a hook, a recognisable figure that could sell the concept. During one particular brainstorm, Jon thought of Batman, but disregarded The Caped Crusader on the grounds that most kids wouldn't know who he was (this was 1985, a few years before Tim Burton's film). Bernie fought back, saying the comics were still popular and the TV series was being repeated, so Jon persuaded Ocean to get the licence. We ask Jon whether DC Comics was restrictive in any way as to what he could and couldn't do with the Batman licence, but it seems to have been fairly accommodating, with only a single demand: "We put Bat Pills in the game and were sternly told that Batman didn't take drugs, so we changed the name to Bat Powers."





These days, Batman is often referred to as Batman 3D, to avoid confusion with Ocean's later Batman games



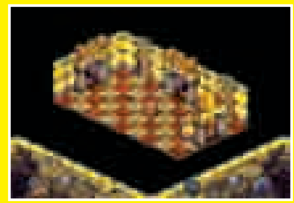


In a clever touch, Head and Heels begin the game in the same location, but with a barrier keeping them apart

›Head Over Heels PC

If you're a fan of the original Head Over Heels then you *must* play the remake from the Retrospec team. Programmed by Tomaz Kac, with graphics by Graham Goring and music by Dorian Black, it's a very faithful update of the Spectrum original with full-colour graphics and some new features (the save system is a godsend). Even Jon is suitably impressed.

The remake is available for Windows, Mac OS X, Linux and BeOS, and can be freely downloaded from **http://retrospec.sgn.net/games/hoh**





With the Batman licence in hand, Jon went about creating the engine for the game, one with a decent physics model so that the entire maze of screens could be put together using pre-built sections and a consistent set of rules. Most of the development time, therefore, could be spent on getting the puzzles right from room to room.

Whether it was the licence, the advertising or the simple fact that it was a fantastic game, Batman sold amazingly well and was held in very high esteem by the press at the time. The game also featured on a number of Spectrum magazine covers, and was ported to the Amstrad CPC, the Amstrad PCW, the MSX, and even the Tatung Einstein, to a similar degree of success.

Heads up!

Despite the critical and commercial success of Batman, Jon Ritman's finest hour was yet to come. In 1987, using the isometric engine developed for Batman, Jon created Head Over Heels. Taking the graphical style and puzzling gameplay from his previous game, he added a second controllable character in order to enhance the puzzle aspects. Whilst the use of the two different characters was hailed as a genuinely brilliant idea (Head could jump high and Heels could run), Jon doesn't really see it that way. In fact, the sole reason he added another playable character was to make the already devious screens seen in Batman ever trickier.

The characters weren't originally called Head and Heels. The original title was Foot and Mouth – only changed at the last minute because "Ocean thought Foot and Mouth didn't quite have the right ring to it..." We have to agree.

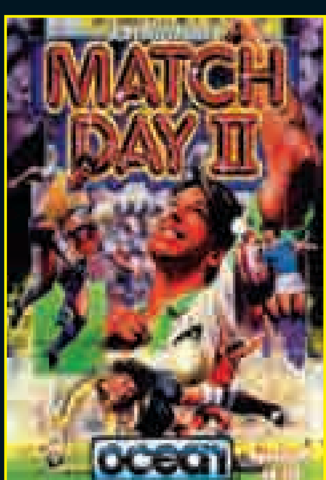
The gameplay might seem obvious now, but back then it really was very clever. The two spies (for Head and Heels were actually involved in a bizarre plot to take back planet Blacktooth and the four nearby planets from an evil dictator) might start off in separate rooms, but once linked together, a tap of a key switches between the two and suddenly a whole new layer of puzzles reveals itself. Moving baddies and electric floors are commonplace, and only with a crafty combination of the two disparate skills can the player prevail. Thankfully, Head and Heels can make use of a number of strange objects littered about the levels: stuffed rabbits give extra lives and abilities, Prince Charles' head acts as a platform, fish grant reincarnation, doughnuts can be used as missiles and springs, and teleports do exactly as you'd imagine.

Featuring over 300 screens (making it twice the size of Batman), Head over Heels was produced by Ritman's largest team yet. It included Guy Stevens, who worked on the sound effects and music, and, of course, Bernie Drummond, who provided the finely honed graphical flair. Jon tells us about the code used to handle the massive playing area: "I seem to remember the map took up about 5KB," he says, "but then it was heavily tokenised and bit streamed – a room and its doors could be described in 7 bytes. The graphics was where all the memory went – they took up about 17KB."

Later, there was a conversion to the emerging Atari ST, with Ocean's in-house programmer Colin Porche pouring over a line-by-line conversion of the code (which was so accurate that the 68000 version even contained the same bugs). All versions, including the one for the C64, received excellent reviews (*Crash* said the game was "definitely the best Ritman/Drummond game yet – it's even better than Batman!") and many gamers acknowledge Head Over Heels as Ritman's finest work.

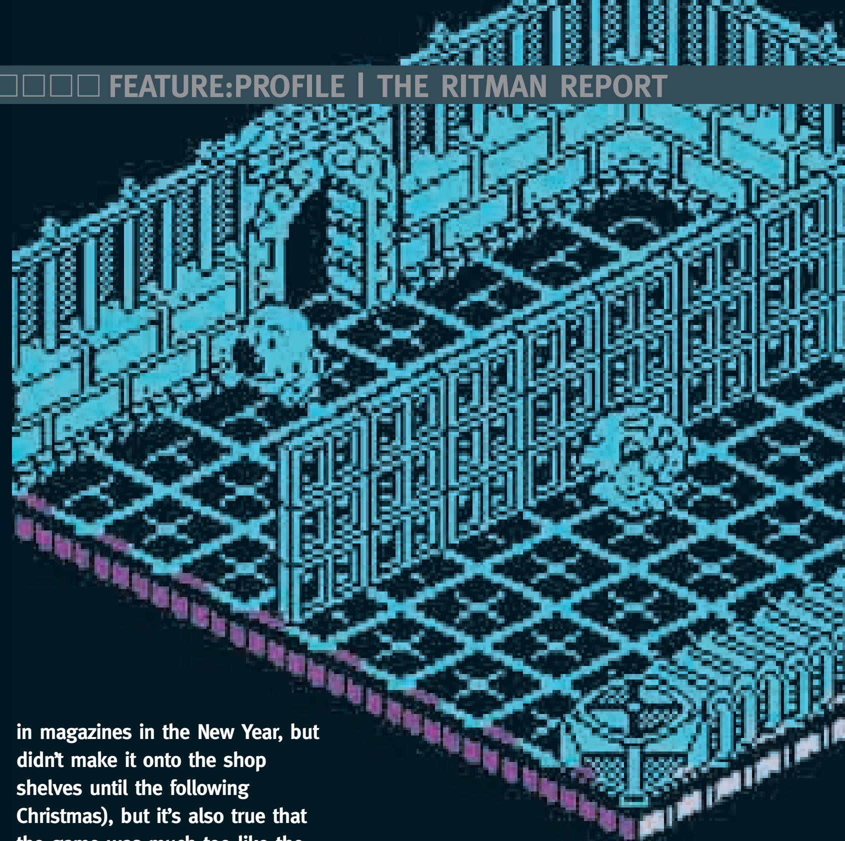
Second half

It would be hard to follow Head Over Heels – Jon knew that and Ocean knew it too. Not wanting to do another isometric game, Jon commenced work on a sequel to Match Day, alongside Bernie Drummond who would add that extra something to the visuals.





Although similar in appearance to the original, the sequel introduced a whole host of footballing features



Match Day II was, against popular tradition, a total re-write from scratch and that gave the pair ample opportunity to add many new features to the game.

For starters, the sequel was a maze of menus and options right from the beginning. Match Day II offered single player, two player versus and even a co-operative two player against the Spectrum; there was also an eight-player cup and league offered. Friendlies completed the line-up of game modes. Another nice touch was the kick-o-meter, which allowed players to vary the strength of each kick, and the much-touted Diamond Deflection System, which calculated the ricochet angle and speed of rebounds on the fly. With full music and sound effects from Guy Stevens, and the ability to volley, back-heel, head and jump for the ball (plus a password-save feature), Match Day II really was leagues ahead of anything else around. At one point, Match Day, its sequel and Batman were all in the *Crash* readers' top 10 at the same time, and *Your Sinclair* concluded its 9/10 review of Match Day II with the comment: "Make Jon Ritman a rich man, because there's no one programming for the Speccy today who's producing such a consistent body of work as he is."

However, the August 1988 issue of *Your Sinclair* featured a revealing interview with Jon and Bernie Drummond in which they declared they'd finished coding for the Spectrum. "Sick as a parrot, Jon, that's what Spectrum owners will be when they hear this," said Bernie.

The truth is that after Match Day II, the duo had commenced work on a scrolling shooter, Starship, but decided mid-way through development to drop the old Sinclair and pick up the 'Razz' board, a custom-developed arcade unit based around a faster version of the Z80. The benefits were obvious – more memory, more colours, and, having been snapped up by Rare, more money.

Your Sinclair's Graeme Kidd did actually get to see Starship in action after it had been abandoned. "A flying saucer zooms along above a smoothly scrolling tessellated landscape, a landscape that forms a globe and is complete with hills and mountains," he wrote. "The playing area is huge – flying at full pelt in one direction, you go for about 45 seconds before circling the globe. Starship had the makings of a great game. What a shame!"

Jon's time with arcade games was short-lived however. "It took a while but I learnt that the sort of games I design do not sit well in the arcade as the learning curve is too long. Look at any arcade game and you get to be pretty damn good very quickly otherwise you don't put any more coins in the slot, whereas a game purchased for the home gets played for much longer periods and can take a more complex structure."

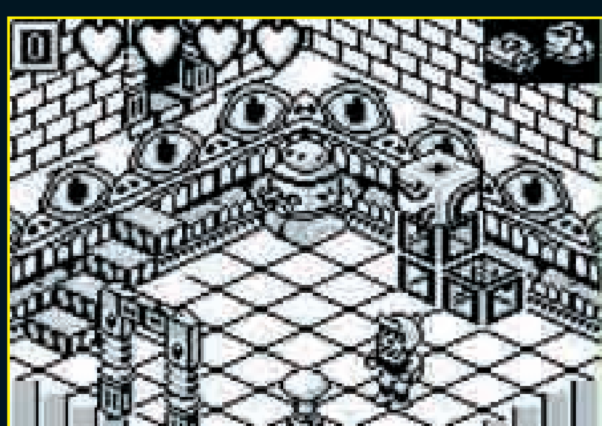
Going mobile

Sadly, then, that would be the last we'd hear from Jon for a while. In fact, he wouldn't release another game for seven years – that game was the quite brilliant Monster Max, an isometric adventure for the Nintendo GameBoy. Despite being twice the size of Head Over Heels (over 600 screens), having great graphics (from Bernie, again), and earning some ecstatic reviews (*Super Gamer* magazine gave it 96%), the game wasn't a great success. Jon thinks this was partly due to Titus taking 12 months to release the game (it was featured in magazines in the New Year, but didn't make it onto the shop shelves until the following Christmas), but it's also true that the game was much too like the Spectrum games and it's a sad fact that it didn't really find much of a market on the GameBoy.

Following the eventual release of Monster Max, Jon founded Cranberry Source, his own company ("Without Cranberry Source it's just another turkey"), and is still very much on the cutting edge of computer games, now working on mobile phone titles. We ask him for specifics, to which he replies: "Currently I'm programming a mobile game, pretty freaky at first as I've never used Java before."

"The biggest problem is the whole time scale," he goes on to say. "As an example, our first deliverable was a playable first level and from scratch I had three weeks to learn a language, learn my way around the platform and make the game – in the past I wouldn't even have started coding in three weeks, I'd just be thinking about it."





Jon's last game was the criminally overlooked Monster Max, released for the GameBoy in 1994

›Missing Citizens

One of the greatest lost-but-legendary Ritman games is Citizens – a Sims-style game before the Sims. We ask Jon if there's anything he could tell us about the game. "Well it's all a bit lost in the mists of time now," he replies. "We tried to turn it into a game after we acquired the rights, but it was too big a task as the version we acquired was far less complete than we might have hoped."

He explains further: "We got an interface and graphics system that had cute characters wandering around a nice-looking isometric town – there were houses, shops, cafes etc. The characters were driven by various impulses but this system was never finished. The idea was that you could adjust the impulses to force a character to change its behaviour. For instance, if you pushed up the hunger factor it would consider going to a café. If you pushed up the lust setting… you get the idea."

The obvious connection you make with The Sims isn't unwelcome: "The Sims came along after and took that market," confirms Jon. Citizens, on the other hand, was sadly canned.

RETRO Treasure

There's classic gaming gold to be found in the latest PC and console releases, as long as you know where to look. *Retro Gamer* points you in the right direction…



There's something about cracking open the box of an eagerly awaited update of a classic game, slamming it into your system and giving it a spin – only to find you still hanker for the good old days. The memory of the thrill you got when you first laid eyes on and played the original game can often water down the remake's appeal.

Developers have quickly realised that the remaking of classic titles would inevitably result in many fans wanting to relive the original games. So in order to give the people what they want, many developers have started to include unlockable or hidden versions of their older properties in today's modern updates. We're not talking about quick, simplified versions of a classics either – many of these games feature the full, untouched originals (often complete with the same bugs and cheats). So good is this duplication on today's consoles that many retro fans will buy new titles just so they can get their hands on the treasure buried within.

In this article, we'll run down some of the best retro Easter eggs we've come across and give you the know-how you need to unlock these hidden classics...

Prince of Persia





The original

Rub those sands of time and whisk yourself back to 1989. Jordan Machner created Prince of Persia for the Apple II, a revolutionary title that combined platforming, combat and adventure to create a silky-smooth epic containing easily the best character animation ever seen at the time. The story was the usual 'rescue the fair damsel from the evil villain' fare, but this was no stock game.

Using an incredible 'rotoscoping' technique, POP featured one of the most believable gaming characters ever seen. He ran, jumped, rolled, fought and died in such a convincing way that the game was an instant 'show your mates' title. But it wasn't just looks that made POP a winner, as the rock-hard gameplay pushed the platformer past its cutsey roots, accelerated the industry and acted as a catalyst for a new wave of platform adventures.

The treasure

Hidden within the depths of Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube is the original PC version of Prince of Persia. To find this classic gem you first need to play through the game until it's around 33% complete. You'll be given a new sword that can break through walls. Carry on until you reach a room with a white switch that can be set to three positions. Across from the switch is a normal-looking wall that can be smashed with your new sword. Do this and a confirmation message will appear. Point the switch at the newly revealed door and run up the steps to play the original game. Alternatively, you can just select the game from the Extra Features menu. (If the original game is too tough for you, enter *LRARU* as a code and you'll be taken to the last level with around 20 minutes to spare).

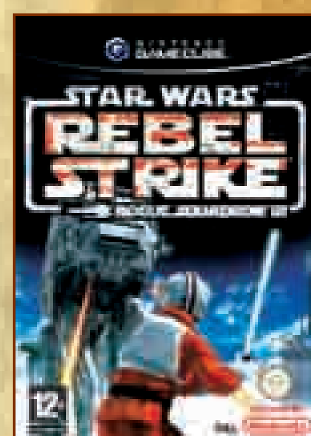
If you have the Xbox version, the above trick will unlock the PC version of Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame. Don't worry if you hanker after the original though, as this will be unlocked when you complete The Sands of Time.

Star Wars Trilogy

The original

The origins of Star Wars games were grounded almost entirely in the epic vehicular struggles of the Rebel Alliance as it faced the all-conquering Empire. Perhaps the most fondly remembered of those early games is Atari's arcade trilogy. The wire-frame visuals of Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back wowed wannabe Skywalkers, and the sit-down cabinets outfitted with chunky flight controls and booming speakers let people relive the memorable scenes from the films. Return of the Jedi wasn't up to the standard of the first two games sadly, replacing the 3D wire-frame wizardry with a scrolling isometric view, but it still has its fans.





The treasure

All three of these coin-op classics can be found in Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike on the GameCube. To access them you must enter the following codes into the Passcodes section of the Options menu. R2-D2 will beep each time a correct code has been entered

To unlock Star Wars enter *RTJPFC!G* followed by *TIMEWARP*. For Empire Strikes Back enter *!H!F?HXS* then *KOOLSTUF*. And to unlock Return of the Jedi enter *!?ATH!RD* followed by *GAME?YES*. Alternatively, you can unlock Star Wars by completing the Death Star Rescue mission, and completing all of the standard missions will unlock The Empire Strikes Back. Only the code can unlock Return of the Jedi however.

Xevious



The original

Not that a plot is of any real use in a scrolling shooter, but in Xevious the story revolves around the Earth being attacked by another race – the Xevions – who claim that mankind is the invader and that the planet is rightfully theirs. Humanity's last hope is the prototype Solvalou fighter...

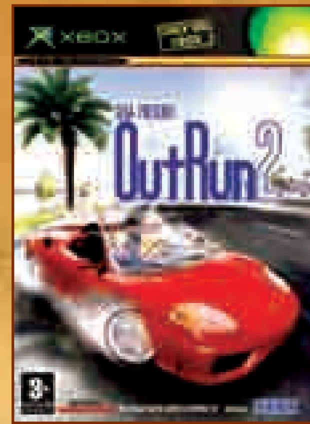
Xevious may at first appear to be a simple scrolling shooter, and in truth it is. But when it first appeared back in 1982, it was the first scroller to feature a dual-attack system for both air and ground targets. The game debuted on the Apple II and then appeared on formats such as the C64, the Spectrum, the Amiga, the NES and the GameBoy.



The treasure

If you fancy giving this slice of blasting retro action a go, find yourself a GameCube and a copy of the new Star Fox Assault game. You then have to suitably hone your skills and collect every silver medal in Story Mode, and Xevious will be yours.

OutRun



The original

Sega's enduring racer is easily one of the most popular retro titles around. Getting into your shiny Ferrari Testarossa with your trophy girlfriend in the passenger seat and slamming the pedal to the floor to the sounds of tropical electro-pop, is an arcade experience that most gamers will never forget. It instantly became one of the most popular arcade racers of all time, and was converted to a range of formats, including all of the major home computers and consoles (with varying degrees of success). Arcade sequels later appeared, such as Turbo OutRun and OutRunners, but it's the original that still holds the top spot for many.



The treasure

The recent OutRun 2 for the Xbox includes the original game as a sneaky bonus for players to unlock. To get it, enter *NINETEEN86* in the password screen, or if you're dead against dirty cheat codes, complete all of the routes in Arcade Mode (on any difficulty). It should be noted, however, that this is the version of OutRun featured in the Shenmue games, and as such there are a few graphical differences.

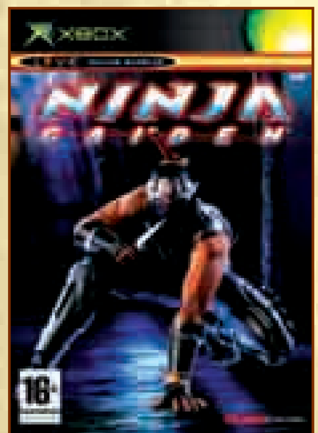
Ninja Gaiden

The original

If Sega's Shinobi was yin, then this would be its yang. Ninja Gaiden started off life on the NES and was a simple side-scrolling scrapper. As Ryu Hayabusa, lethal ninja warrior, you were on a mission to find your father, and this meant fighting through level after level of increasingly tough bad guys and larger-than-life bosses. Armed with the Dragon Sword, shuriken and a dose of ninja magic, you'd fight street punks, gangsters and all manner of evil creatures, eventually waging war on the dark forces of the underworld. While the button-bashing gameplay was fairly simple, it *was* Shinobi for the NES, and fans who had played the Shinobi arcade unit to death could now play a ninja assassin in their own homes.



The series spanned another two games – Ninja Gaiden II: the Dark Sword of Chaos and Ninja Gaiden III: the Ancient Ship of Doom – and the formula remained much the same.



The treasure

All three of the original oriental battlers can be found sneaking around in the rock-hard Xbox remake of Ninja Gaiden, but to get them you'll need to put in the hours.

The hardest of the three to unlock is the original Ninja Gaiden. To get it you need to find 50 scarabs and give them to Masamura. He'll then give you the original game. To play it, go to the arcade cabinet in Han's Bar. To get Ninja Gaiden II, make sure you have the first game in your inventory then shoot the clock face on the tower in Tairon (where Masamura's shop is located). The third and final game can be obtained by returning to the Peristyle Passage in the aquaduct and jumping up onto the pillar that once contained a golden scarab.

To unlock all three games from the main menu, rather than from within the game, beat the story with the games in your inventory.

Pitfall



The original

A definite iconic classic here. The original adventures of one Pitfall Harry owed more than a little to *Indiana Jones*, as crocodile avoiding, jog jumping and rope swinging were the tricks of our hero's trade. Pitfall was amazingly tough and certainly wasn't a stranger to frustration, but people still kept coming back to give the adventure one more try. The goal of all this jungle hopping? To find as much treasure as possible in 20 minutes. And if you last that long, you're a legend.



The treasure

The original Pitfall can be found in most of the sequels and updates. If you've got Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure you can unlock the original using a special code. For example, on the SNES, press A five times followed by Select and Start on the main title screen. On the PC, type *letsdothetimewarp* during play, and on the Atari Jaguar press the C button 26 times and then press Down while the cursor is highlighting Info on the menu.

The game is also hidden in Pitfall 3D: Beyond the Jungle on the PlayStation. To gain access, show some respect to the original author by entering *CRANESBABY* as a password. Oh, and if you can't keep up with the Indiana Joneses, press L1 and L2 during play for infinite lives.

Finally, if you own a copy of Pitfall: The Lost Expedition on the PS2, Xbox or GameCube, you can enter codes at the main menu that will unlock both Pitfall and the even better sequel, Pitfall 2. Alternatively, you can unlock both games during play. For the first game, buy the 'mystery item' from the shaman, and for the sequel, collect all the idols in the game and take them to the shaman.

› Sega arcade classics

Not one, not two, not three, but *four* Sega System 16 classics can be found still doing the rounds in the Shenmue series on the Dreamcast and Xbox. Pay a visit to the You Arcade in Dobuita in Shenmue and you'll be able to put both Hang-On and Space Harrier through their paces.

In Shenmue II you'll find that the Pine Arcade in the Golden Quarter of Wanchai contains Space Harrier and OutRun. To play Hang On you'll need to get to Kowloon and enter the Yellow Head building. Find room 222 and you'll see the arcade inside. AfterBurner can be found on the first floor of the Phoenix building in Kowloon, but you'll need to enter the fight contest to gain access.



› Sheep on drugs

Two of the strangest Easter eggs you're ever likely to come across, can be found in Defender 2000 on the Atari Jaguar. If you enter your highscore name as *OVINE* you'll hear a sheep go "baaaa" in the background – well, this is a Jeff Minter game after all. You'll now be able to play Flossie Defender, which is basically a psychedelic version of Defender Plus starring Flossie the Sheep! And, for a game of Plazma Pong, enter your name as *NOLAN* on the highscore table.



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

The original

In the late 80s and early 90s you couldn't go anywhere without seeing green-masked faces starring back at you. Those were the days of Turtle Power, and every kid wanted a piece of the pizza (ahem). Turtle cartoons, comics, movies, toys, books, lunchboxes and clothes appeared, as did an excellent arcade game.

The TMNT arcade game was a scrolling beat-em-up just like Final Fight, only with bright vibrant visuals and four-player co-op gaming. We'd hate to think just how much these units sucked out of people's pockets in their day. It wasn't long before home systems received a version of the arcade game, but thanks to the gulf in technology between the two platforms, they sadly weren't that great.



The treasure

Thankfully, home systems are now more than capable of delivering perfect coin-op conversions, and if you grab a copy of TMNT 2: Battle Nexus on the PC, PS2, Xbox or GameCube, you'll be able to play the original. To get it, fight through to level 9-1 and work your way up to the roof. Here you'll find an artefact. Take it back to your base and have April evaluate it in the 2nd Time Around section. The game will then be available.

Wolfenstein 3D



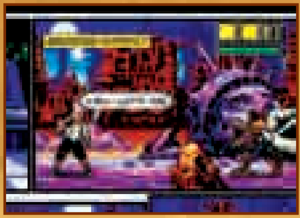
The original
While the superior Doom eventually went on to define the FPS genre, it was this Nazi-bashing shooter that laid the groundwork. Wolfenstein 3D was as impressive as it was controversial when it arrived in 1992, and never before had gamers played such an immersive and visceral title. Before it was censored on various platforms, Wolfenstein saw the player take on the German army as Allied soldier BJ Blazkowicz. Eventually you even had to fight Hitler, who just happened to be equipped with a robot suit of armour. Nice.

Needless to say, future versions were made a little more PC, and Nazi references were removed on grounds of bad taste, but the game still retained its core gameplay – gameplay that has helped to shape every FPS since.

The treasure
If you want to relive the golden days of the FPS you'll need to grab yourself an Xbox and a copy of the excellent remake, Return to Castle Wolfenstein. Play through the game to the end and you'll find the option to play the original Wolfenstein 3D on the main menu.



Comix Zone





The original
Sadly, this novel title didn't do to well when it appeared on the Megadrive in 1996, and although it was generally regarded as a good game, the licence just vanished, with only a PC port and a GameBoy Advance version seeing the light of day.

In the game you play Sketch Turner, a comic book artist who is dragged into his own comic strip by the villain of the story. The gameplay is basic combat, but each level takes place on a comic page, split into the various panels. Characters talk using speech bubbles, and the whole game looks just like a real comic. As well as the combat there's a puzzle element thrown in, and you can also choose how you make your way through the levels. It's inspired stuff.

The treasure
This underrated classic is included as an unlockable bonus in the recently released Sonic Mega Collection Plus for PS2 and Xbox. To gain access to the game (and to another Megadrive title, The Ooze), you need to have a Sonic Heroes saved game on your memory card. Now load the game as normal and the two games will be automatically available.

Not-so-hidden treasure

More retro classics can be found in a number of Namco PlayStation games, but rather than being unlockable, you can play them while the game actually loads. Fire up Ridge Racer and you can play a game of Galaxian, and if you load Tekken you can play Galaga while gearing up for combat. Ridge Racer Revolution, meanwhile, begins with a game of Galaga '88.

In a nice touch, your retro gaming skills are actually rewarded. For example, if you destroy all of the enemies in Galaxian you will unlock eight extra cars in Ridge Racer. And if you clear all eight stages of Galaga, you'll unlock Devil Kazuya in Tekken.



Spy Hunter



The original
If secret agents and fast cars are your thing, then this 007-inspired arcade car chase is the game for you. As the square-jawed spy in question, it's your mission to drive your high-tech sports car into battle against a wheeled syndicate intent on global domination. Using guns, smoke screens and oil slicks, you have to stay on the road and make sure your enemies don't. Your car can even turn into a speed boat. How cool is that?

The treasure
The Spy Hunter 3D remake on PS2, Xbox and GameCube contains the full original game. To get it enter *OGSPY* in a spare slot at the beginning of the game, and it will then be selectable.



eMag

RETRO PASSION

Our beloved hobby of retro gaming provides ample scope for humorous tomfoolery and calamitous high jinks. Craig Vaughan recently asked members of the *Retro Gamer* online forum to recount their retro gaffes and childhood triumphs, and was soon snowed under with tales of misspent youth and joystick japery. Here's a rundown of those we could print without being sued…

Name: Rik Cowan
Forum ID: RetroRik



Around 1983 when I was 14 I got my second computer. My first was a VIC-20 and the new addition was a rubber-keyed 48K Spectrum. As with all kids back then it was my pride and joy. Unfortunately, the keyboards on early Spectrums were prone to faults – the plastic membrane under the rubber keys had metal tracks and these would break, stopping half the keyboard working. Well, one day it happened to me and I was gutted. I now had a Spectrum 48K that only half worked. Later at a friend's house I noticed that his 16K Spectrum was in a toy box under his bed so I got scheming. The next day I went round and asked for a drink. When he left the room I shoved his 16K Spectrum up my jacket. I had my drink, waited 10 minutes then said I had to go. At home I opened up both Spectrums and swapped over the plastic membranes, giving me a good 48K and leaving my friend with a dodgy 16K that he wasn't using anyway. Nothing wrong with that is there?

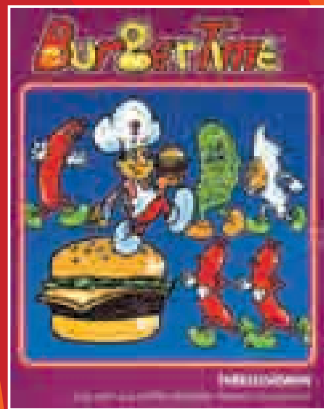
Anyway the next day I went around to his house again and smuggled the dodgy 16K Spectrum back into his toy box. Feeling smug about my clever deed I later went home to play with my Spectrum 48K. Problem was, it no longer worked at all, though I didn't know why.

When I next saw my unsuspecting friend he explained that he couldn't understand how, when he tried to fix his broken 16K Spectrum, it had started working perfectly – and he'd never realised that it was actually a Spectrum 48K. Yes, you guessed it: I now had his broken 16K Spectrum with my broken keyboard membrane. I couldn't tell him what I'd done so I was stuck with it. My friend was the only winner that weekend. Luckily my parents were kind enough to buy me a new one that Christmas knowing mine was broken, so we both won in the end, but I'm sure there's a lesson there somewhere.

"I opened up both Spectrums and swapped over the plastic membranes, giving me a good 48K and leaving my friend with a dodgy 16K that he wasn't using anyway. Nothing wrong with that is there?"
– Rik Cowan learns that computer crime never pays

Name: Dan Karlsson
Forum ID: Dasse



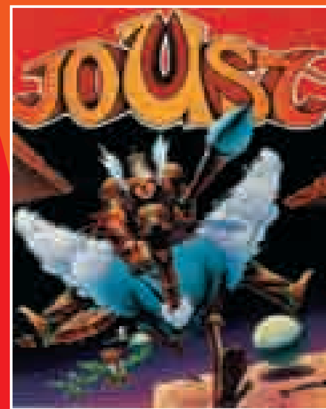


Back in the early 80s my friend 'Putte' had bought BurgerTime for his Intellivision and he invited me over for a game. I was really hooked because the graphics, gameplay and sound were all so great. After we had played the game so much that our eyes almost popped out, we checked the box and manual. Back then our English was very poor, but we read: "BurgerTime is also available for the Atari 2600 and Colecovision." We only understood the words 'Atari 2600' and thought that this Intellivision cartridge would also work on my Atari at home.

We took the cartridge and tried to squeeze it into the slot of my 2600, but figured that something was wrong because it wouldn't fit. We really tried and got quite aggressive, so much so that we eventually heard a cracking noise. After that scary sound we didn't try any more. It was a very long time until we understood what the problem was, and now 20 years later we still laugh every time we recall it.

Name: Iain Prideaux
Forum ID: Mookie





My story concerns that excellent arcade game machine Joust. Living near Weston-super-Mare as a teenager, my friends and I would often cycle to the arcades and spend otherwise boring Saturday afternoons down at the Regent Street arcade, the only place that had decent games like Pac-Man, Asteroids and Defender. We would play Joust for hours, have an ice cream and walk along the pier. Of course, the sea never came in to Weston-super-Mud!

Anyway, still buzzing with the cut and thrust of Joust, we would then cycle home on our Raleigh Choppers. One such day we decided to hold our own Joust competition using brooms. After much practise, we'd cycle furiously towards each other, playing chicken and knocking each other off. Months of fun finally came to an abrupt end one Christmas day when I spent six hours in casualty as a result of an errant broom handle causing relatively serious abdominal injuries. Needless to say, my jousting days were over. You'd think I'd have learned from that experience, but trying to emulate Tony Hawks some years later resulted in an argument with an oncoming BMW and a return visit to the same hospital, where as an adult I had less excuse for my tomfoolery than I had when they were using tweezers to pick splinters out of my chest all those years before.

Name: Neil Balmer
Forum ID: Spinal

A while ago, a friend of mine gave me a disc, and on it was a diagram and driver for attaching

"Months of fun finally came to an abrupt end one Christmas day when I spent six hours in casualty as a result of an errant broom handle causing relatively serious abdominal injuries"
– Iain Prideaux on the dangers of real-world Joust



Neil Balmer's machine. Is it a PC or a NES or a NES in a PC?

a SNES controller to a PC via the parallel port. I was amazed that someone had gone to the trouble of figuring out how a SNES controller worked and was obsessed enough to hook it up to a PC and write a driver so it could be used as a regular PC game controller. Needless to say, the first thing I did was chop up a SNES controller in order to play my retro games with true authenticity. Upon closer inspection of the disc given to me, there were diagrams for a whole host of retro game controllers, for the Atari 2600, Megadrive, NES and more.

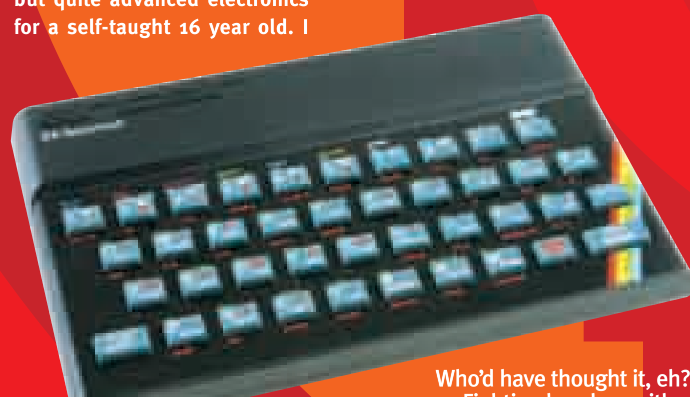
A few years later, I no longer had my SNES controller, but I still wanted to play my games in true retroness. A quick Internet search revealed the 'DirectPad Project', which enabled the following controllers to be used – Megadrive, Atari Jaguar, Nintendo 64, NES, PlayStation, Saturn, Master System, SNES, TurboGrafx and Virtual Boy. This time, rather than butchering controllers, I wanted to build a converter, so that in the event of one or both of the controllers dying, I wouldn't have to go through the whole re-wiring bit again. A quick Net search revealed that more and more people were building PCs inside NES cases, usually hooking up the keyboard and mouse round the back, and using the DirectPad software to hook up NES controllers to the front. So I decided that building a NES PC would be much better than just connecting controllers to my PC, but realised that my NES would have to die in order to make such a machine.

Well, after pulled all the innards out of my NES, I finally summoned the courage to go ahead. I sliced off the front of my NES with a 79p junior hacksaw, stuck it to the front of a spare drive-bay cover, hooked up the Power/Reset buttons and the LED, ran a cable through the PC and out the back to the parallel port, installed the driver and that was that. Now I play most of my emulated games with my NES controller, and I even switch my PC on with an original NES power button! Now all I need to do is paint my PC Nintendo grey...

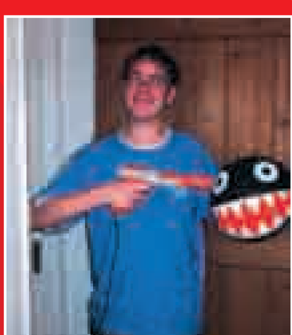
Name: Dean Woodyatt
Forum ID: Bleugh

Back in 1993 when I was doing my GCSE Craft, Design and Technology award, I couldn't think of anything better to test my electronic skills than my Spectrum. I used my Spectrum +3 and Artist 2 to create standard layout sheets, then I used a 48K Speccy to create an input/output port. The I/O port was fairly simple really, but quite advanced electronics for a self-taught 16 year old. I spent several days wiring up a matrix of LEDs to form an 8x8 display, then I wrote a large amount of BASIC to control the matrix.

To go that little bit further, I then added more code to turn the Speccy into a house alarm system – I used a huge A2-size piece of acrylic and drew on my parents' house layout (using those scratch on transfers), with an LED for each door and window. Then, on screen, I drew the same layout with a blob as a burglar – when the burglar walked through a door on screen (or triggered the relevant switch on the board for that point) the LED would flash and



Who'd have thought it, eh? Fighting burglary with a Sinclair Spectrum



Name: Ruaridh Ellery
Forum ID: Godeye

Back in 2000, I was 10 years old and my only retro gaming experience had been playing Chopper X on my Dad's Atari ST 520 (mine now), so the only reason this tragedy came about was through ignorance. My family and I had gone on holiday to Dubai for a few weeks, and as you may know, Dubai is the land of shopping. We were in one of the many shopping malls and I noticed that it had a huge arcade in it. I've no idea if there were any classic coin-ops there, but perhaps it's worth checking out if any retro gamers are ever passing by...

Anyway, we came across a toyshop. Being 10, I insisted on entering, and this being the age of the portable, the store was full of oddments such as a solar-powered GameBoy (ideally suited to the weather in Dubai). But the problem was that all of the games were fakes. Fortunately, this was easy to spot because their boxes were labelled "Gameboy TN", and on the back the stickers read "made in Japam". I also saw that there were loads of Game & Watches, real ones I might add. The problem was that at the time I just thought they were stupid little LCDs and didn't realise their significance. Why would I want them when I could have fake copies of Pokémon Gold and Silver, or a "Polystation Plus" console? Anyway, the tragedy unravelled recently when I read *Retro Gamer*'s Game & Watch article and realised the joys and potential profit that I had missed out on...

an alarm would sound. I even triggered a relay to play a tape-recorded message while another button fast dialled on the phone, so that your house could ring you if it got burgled. Of course, that wasn't enough, so I went on to make a basic turtle. This was basically some Lego with a couple of motors and a felt pen attached. It could follow the joystick or draw pre-programmed stuff. I still have the LED matrix in my parent's house complete with the layout too!

Overall, it was a worthwhile project because I got into the student innovation awards Welsh finals and won a commendation. It looks great on my CV and it's all thanks to Sir Clive's humble Spectrum.



Name: Billy Withers
Forum ID: Turrican

This story begins in the winter of 1999, when Sony's little grey box was ruling bedrooms across the world. I had one, but it was on its last legs, so I had to make it do a really good impression of a tightrope walker by balancing it on its side to get games to work. I'd borrowed a copy of the X-Files game from someone I knew and I was looking forward to seeing what it was like, so with a smile on my face I put the first disc in, pushed the 'on' button and then got ready to enjoy my gaming evening.

As I got up to move to the chair, one of the floorboards must have had a nervous twitch because I saw my beloved PlayStation start to teeter. What happened next was inevitable. All that was missing was some epic classical music and a slow-motion movie shot. "Timber!" went the PlayStation! I opened the lid and looked at the disc. Oh dear... Big Scratch City.

I had a heavy feeling in my gut, probably from my jaw hitting it on its way to the floor. I ended up having to trade-in some of my own games to get a replacement copy for my mate. Every time I see the guy I borrowed it from, I get is the *X-Files* theme tune whistled to me. Sad to say that it wasn't even a good game and if I had known that before the accident I could have done something about it. I did get my revenge though because I later managed to trade-in the scratched X-Files game to get some of my favourite titles back. I laugh about it now, but I have never hated Mulder and Scully more than at that point. At least I managed to rectify the situation, but that theme music will haunt me for another few moons.

"I won a commendation and it's all thanks to Sir Clive's humble Spectrum"

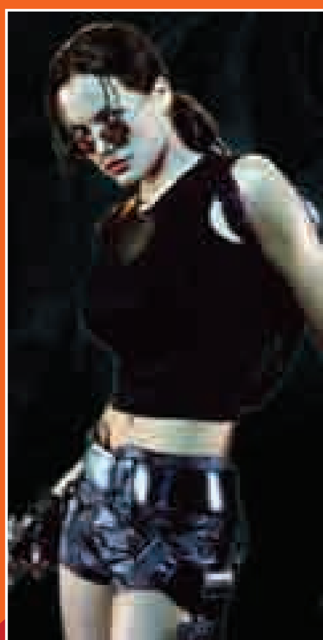
– Dean Woodyatt proves that computers really do help with your schoolwork

Name: David Dickson



My confession relates to Lara Croft and her adventures in the Tomb Raider games. Looking back now it's quite scary to think how things got out of control so quickly. Once the first game hit the PlayStation, young Miss Croft seemed to be everywhere. I remember seeing the actress who played her on chat shows, breakfast TV and doing shop openings. I wasn't even really a fanatical games player, but Tomb Raider soon took over my life. I found myself missing work, playing the game day in day out and travelling all over Britain in search of a quick photo or an autograph from Lara herself.

Eventually, I snapped out of it enough to realise that I had a problem. As the sequels came out I still took more than a



passing interest, but eventually managed to wean myself off the series. I still play computer games, but these days confine my activities to Fifa 2005 and Crash Bandicoot. I'm an estate agent now and I see that as my sins having caught up with me.

Name: Gabriel McGrath
Forum ID: Mr_Staypuft

Early in 1988, *Zzap!64* previewed a new device – a special cartridge called the Amulator that allowed your Commodore 64 to run Amiga games. The photographs looked amazing. It was a great effort by the *Zzap!64* staff who'd made up this baloney and published it on April 1st. This got me thinking about devising my own prank...

Soon afterwards, I was reading a funny C64 advert in an old edition of *Australian Personal Computer*. The top half was divided into four photographs. One had a teenage boy playing games on his new Commodore. Another had 'Dad' doing the family accounts. Yet another had 'Mum' typing a letter. And a fourth photo featured a screenshot of a red fire hydrant and a sad-looking dog. The headline? "Commodore makes software for every member of the family, except dogs."

That made my mind tick over. Why wasn't there any software for dogs? Of course, because there was no *hardware* for dogs. I quickly gathered everything I needed: a dog's collar, a piece of cable with a 9-pin plug on the end, and an FM transmitter circuit that looked suitably small and 'high-tech'. I also grabbed one of Dad's old neckties and a roll of black and white film for my camera. I attached the cable to the circuit board, and the circuit board to the collar. And with that, the DogTronics™ K-9000 controller was complete. Hardware for your hound! A peripheral for your pup!

DogTronics™ had a product, but we needed a CEC (Chief Executive Canine). The family dog, Sandy, was happy to accept my nomination. I tied Dad's old striped tie around his neck and congratulated him. Sandy also accepted the positions of spokesdog and catalogue model. So now our marketing campaign could begin. I took numerous photographs of Sandy, in his tie with the K-9000 controller. As it was the late 1980s, I was using a film camera, so I had to wait for

"The more sleep I was getting in the day, the more hours I could spend playing Doom and its variants through the night"

– Martin Rawsthorne swaps the real world for one filled with low-level animated violence



Gabriel McGrath shows us it's a dog's life.





the shots to develop. It was also a number of years before Microsoft Word for Windows, so I had to create the DogTronics™ brochure on my C64 word processor. I printed out the pages on my dot matrix printer, then cut and pasted them with the photos. And that's where the story came to an abrupt end because my prank was never finished and it never got sent to *Zzap!64*.

Unfortunately, my family moved house, and I lost all the pieces of my project. But 15 years later, one piece of the puzzle was unearthed. Only recently, I was talking about retro gaming with my sister, when she mentioned she had "a photo of our dog wearing a tie with some computer thing". Somehow she'd ended up with one of the photos, despite moving twice in the last 10 years. It was badly damaged, but after about three hours of retouching, Retro Gamer readers can finally view the world's only surviving evidence of the DogTronics™ K-9000 controller. Now, where's our cat gone? I've got an empty 256Mb flash card in my Canon Digicam…

Name: Martin Rawsthorne

There I was, back in the day, happy in the knowledge that computer games were for nerds. Not something a busy successful sales executive like myself would ever be interested in. Then I saw Doom on my brother-in-law's Jaguar console. This first-person shooter in a 3D world instantly captivated me. I couldn't get to my local videogame store quick enough. It brought a whole new meaning to the phrase 'Jaguar dealer'. Instead of leather interior and 20-inch alloys, I came out of the store with the key to a world of unimaginable horrors. As I immersed myself in this macabre environment, I'm sorry to report I rather left reality behind. My wife, who to this day just doesn't 'get it', hated Doom in all its variants and subsequent spin-offs. This usually meant that the Jaguar didn't go on until my wife had finished watching a seemingly endless stream of *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale*, *EastEnders* and the like. Oh, how I dreamed of blending the two by wandering into the Rovers Return with my Plasma rifle.

Anyway, the upshot was that by the time I cleared a level or two, it was usually well past four in the morning. I'd climb into bed, often waking my wife who would mumble "What time is it?" I would glance at the dull glow of the alarm clock in the dark, which would often read 03:47, and reply cheerfully: "Oh, just gone midnight my sweet, sweet angel!" I wasn't quite so cheerful when that same alarm did its evil work only several hours later.

Having built up a reputation as a successful salesman at work, I was pretty much left to my own devices. I used to spend six hours having face-to-face contact with my customers across the south of England, every day Monday to Friday and even the odd Saturday morning. I was too keen, that is until Doom arrived and then my job came a poor second. Over the months, work dropped to about two hours a day followed by four hours kip at various well-hidden car parks along my route. The more sleep I was getting in the day, the more hours I could spend playing Doom and its variants through the night. Before long I was playing Quake and similar shooters on my brand new PC, bought because I told the wife that the hole in the roof wasn't that serious and the money could be better spent elsewhere. My brother-in-law became my new best friend, which was handy because for some reason I wasn't seeing so much of the old crowd by then. I was soon introduced to level design and I quickly got the hang of it. No more for me the dread of the last level…

Today I'm still playing the near infinite number of other people's efforts snatched off the Internet. I lost my sales job, but that was no bad thing. I remember the board of directors well and following my 'resignation' I spent weeks with a graphics and level-design program trying to add their likenesses to the monsters I was combating.

eMag

Next Level Gaming: ZX Spectrum 128

Games hardware is continually evolving and manufacturers are always eager for you to upgrade to the latest system. But did the upgrade path always lead to bigger and better games? In the first of a new regular series, Martyn Carroll looks at the benefits of owning a super-powered computer



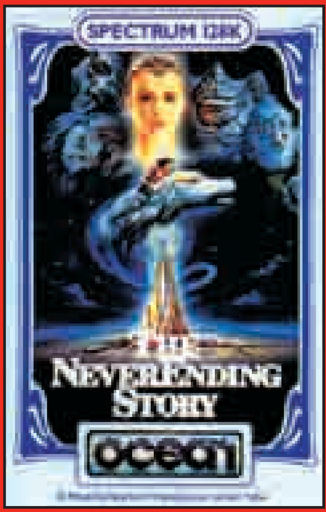


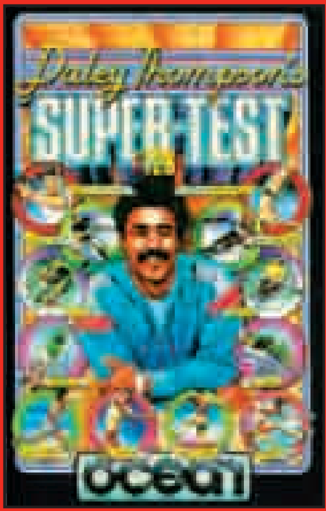
The Spectrum 128 was initially launched in Spain towards the end of 1985, and the UK version first appeared in February 1986. While it looked a lot like the + model, the heatsink stuck to the right-hand side of the casing gave the game away – there was obviously something new and powerful lurking inside. The trusty Zilog Z80A processor was the same, but now the Speccy boasted a stonking 128KB of RAM. The popular AY-3-8912 sound chip was also added, allowing for three-channel audio output that made a mockery of the Spectrum's original 'beeper' chip. MIDI compatibility was included, as was an RS-232 serial port and an RGB output. A 48K mode was included too, so the computer was compatible with the massive range of Spectrum software. But which kids in their right mind would want to play crusty old 48K games when the promise of bigger, better and sweeter-sounding 128K mega-games were in the offing?

A drop in the Ocean

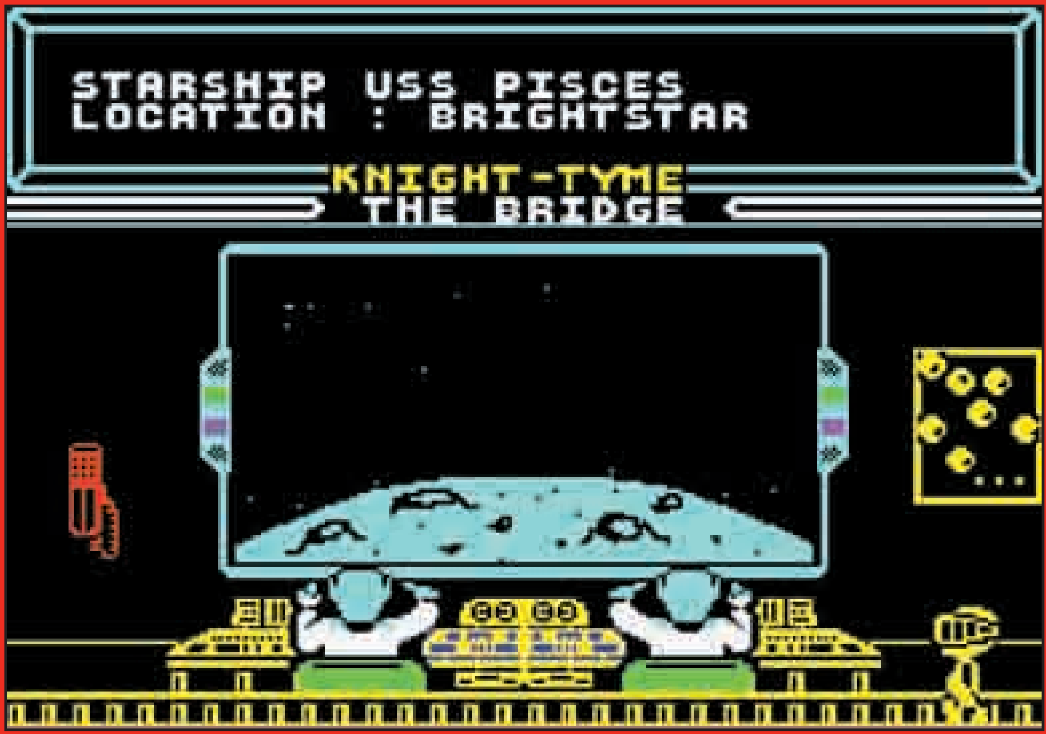
The Spectrum 128 was bundled with two Ocean games – Daley Thompson's Super-Test and The NeverEnding Story. Both were pulled from Ocean's vast back catalogue and polished up to showcase the power of the new machine. Super-Test featured more activities to make you waggle your Quickshot – four events from the original Decathlon had been bolted on (100m sprint, 110m hurdles, triple jump and javelin), bringing the total number to 12. Best of all, the whole game loaded in one go, rather than loading four events at a time. To top things off, Super-Test opened with a pleasing rendition of the *Chariots of Fire* theme tune.

The AY sound chip was stretched further in The NeverEnding Story. This text adventure played a looped





Two rejigged Ocean games were bundled with the Spectrum 128



version of Limahl's title tune as you were playing. It sounded great the first time, maybe even the second, but after you'd heard it *over a hundred times* (which was more than likely as this was a long and challenging adventure) you wanted to tear the speakers from your TV set. NeverEnding indeed... Aside from the new music, this was exactly the same as the 48K version, although it now loaded in a single sitting.

Both games did at least show off the 128's capabilities, but it was a shame a brand new title created specifically for the 128 wasn't bundled with the machine. It was the same story with the 10 or so games that were lined up to mark the machine's launch. Technician Ted Mega-Mix was an updated version of the original (released two years earlier), with twice as many screens and a number of extra tasks to perform. There were also Sweevo's Whirled, an enhanced version of Sweevo's World that included many more locations, and the 128K version of Three Weeks in Paradise, which in typically bizarre fashion included a secret missile base beneath the sea. Odin, meanwhile, added new music and speech samples to Nodes of Yesod and Robin of the Wood and released them as new 128K versions. Laziest of the lot was CRL who pulled its ropey Rocky Horror Picture Show game from the archives and merely added an improved AY version of the Time Warp. Oh, the horror!

Publishers weren't exactly ignoring the 128, but they weren't embracing it either. They were just testing the water with updated versions of older games, usually with added AY sound and perhaps a larger game map. This changed in June 1986 with the release of the first 128-dedicated game, which came from the unlikeliest of sources.

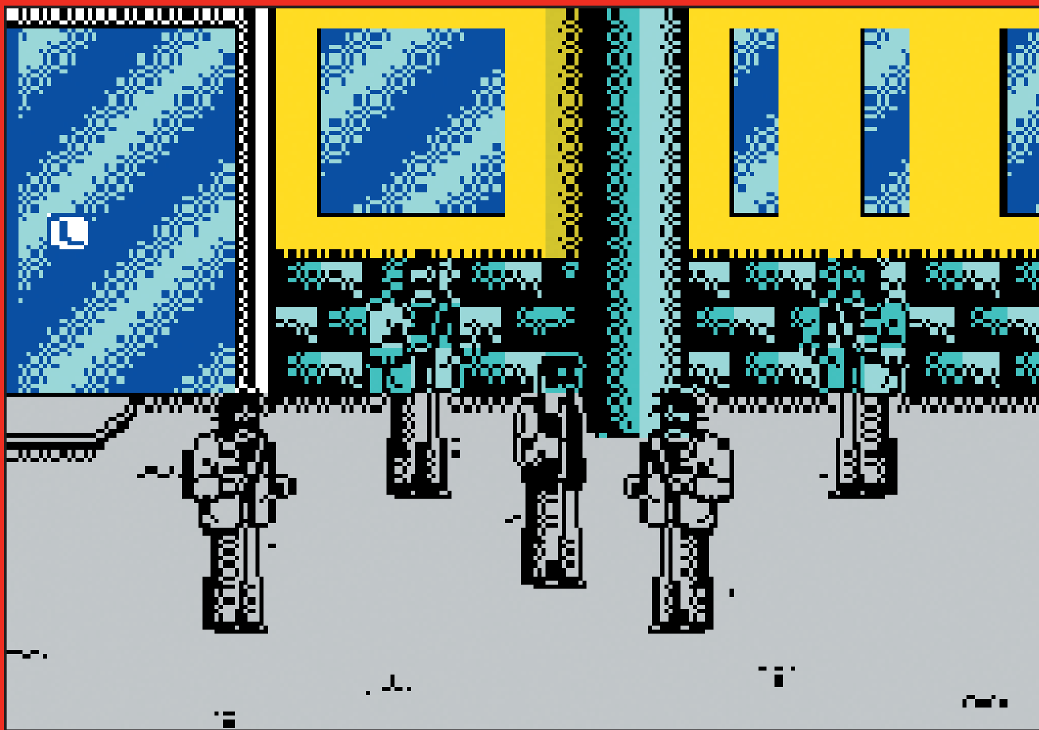
MAD tymes

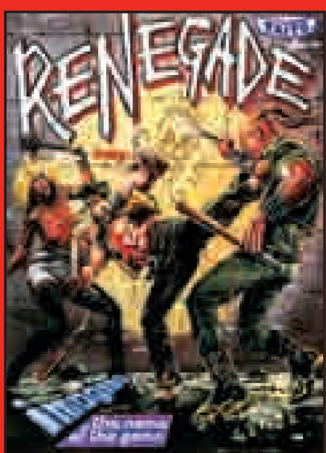
Mastertronic was the UK's first budget software house, and it had made a considerable impact on the market with its range of cheap and cheerful games. The company initially played it safe, releasing its own versions of coin-op classics like Centipede and Space Invaders, but in 1985 it launched the MAD (Mastertronic Added Dimension) label. Instead of knocking out games at £1.99, the new range would retail at £2.99 and the product would be much more polished. David Jones' Spellbound, one of the first MAD releases, was the perfect advert for the new range. This colourful graphic adventure was easily on a par with full-price releases of the day, and it was a massive hit, shifting over 60,000 copies on the Spectrum.



Knight Tyme – the first 128K-dedicated game, and easily one of the best budget games ever released

A sequel was promised and Knight Tyme duly arrived. But everyone was surprised to find that the new game was a dedicated 128 title. Mastertronic had seen what every other publisher was doing and did the exact opposite. Instead of taking an old 48K game and releasing an enhanced version for the 128, it developed a game with the 128 in mind and





The 128K version of Renegade featured an exclusive level, missing from the 48K port

later released a stripped-down 48K version.

Knight Tyme 128 was a superb adventure title, featuring head-pecking puzzles, a large cast of characters to interact with, an expansive playing area (it was set aboard a spaceship and you could beam down to different planets), and a fabulous in-game tune written by David Whittaker. In comparison, the 48K version (released three months later) featured fewer puzzles, characters and locations, and there was no tune to tap your foot to. It was still a tidy little title, but the 128K game was bigger and better in everyway.

Sadly, Mastetronic's faith in the new format was not rewarded with significant sales. Knight Tyme 128 only sold 7,400 copies, while the 48K version shifted 32,700. Disappointing figures showing that there were obviously more 48K than 128K owners out there. Undeterred, Mastertronic went on to release 128K versions of Spellbound and the fourth and final Magic Knight game, Stormbringer.

The release of Knight Tyme certainly didn't open the floodgates, and only a small number of 128 games trickled out over the next 12 months. Worse still, these were generally updates of old 48K games. Elite 128 introduced three new missions and fixed a number of bugs that players had used as cheats. Fairlight 128 introduced music and added some new secret locations, but it served as little more than an advert for Fairlight II. Worst of the lot was Ghostbusters 128, a contemptible update of a two-year-old game in which the only new addition was a funky AY version of Ray Parker Junior's rubbish theme song.

Things improved when Ocean, who'd pledged support from the start, released Tai-Pan in August 1987. This sprawling trading game, based on the James Clavell novel, was developed specifically for the 128, though a feature-limited 48K version was also available. But unlike Mastertronic and its Magic Knight games, Ocean didn't release two separate versions. Instead, Tai-Pan came with the 128K version on one side of the tape, and the 48K version on the other. A Spectrum +3 disk version was also released, so every Spectrum owner could play a version of the game designed for their machine.

Things then continued in much the same vain, with almost every publisher providing 48K and 128K versions of their games. Imagine's Renegade was a typical example, with the 128K

›Star turn



To tie-in with the launch of the +2, Ocean released a four-game compilation pack called Stars on the 128K. The two Spectrum 128 launch titles were included – Daley Thompson's Super-Test and The NeverEnding Story – and these were joined by two new updates, International Match Day and Yie Ar Kung-Fu +2. The former was basically Match Day with a new international league, an improved AY rendition of the *Match of the Day* theme, and a comedy crowd celebration that played when you banged a goal in. The confusingly titled Yie Ar Kung-Fu +2 was not the sequel but the original one-on-one fighter with new opponents, including a three-on-one fight halfway through the game.







Ocean set the precedent, with massive Xmas sequels Robocop 2 and Chase H.Q.2 not available for the 48K

version featuring in-game music, an additional level and the very useful shoulder throw manoeuvre – all elements that were missing from the basic 48K version. With the sequel, Target Renegade, 48K owners had to suffer the indignity of loading each level in turn, whereas the 128K version benefited from a single, albeit lengthy, load.

Amstrad action

By 1987, more and more games were being developed for the 128K Spectrum. This was no doubt due to the popularity of the new +2 machine, which was rushed out to supersede the 128 following Amstrad's acquisition of Sinclair Research. The +2 was technically a 128 with a proper keyboard, two internal joystick ports and a built-in tape deck. To many owners of 48K models, Amstrad was offering an attractive upgrade package, and at £150 the +2 was cheaper than the 128's initial launch price of £180.

With the new hardware driving the Spectrum market forward, Ocean released the first 128K-only game of note, Where Time Stood Still, in August 1988. A 48K port of this impressive isometric adventure was planned (in April 1989, *Crash* reported that: "the impossible has been done... Where Time Stood Still has been crammed in 48K!") but was never released. Sales of the game were impressive enough to convince Ocean that there was a market for 128K-only software and that there was less and less need to cater for 48K owners.

The shift away from the 48K Spectrum was completed around the tail-end of 1990, when four of Ocean's biggest Christmas releases, Robocop 2, Chase H.Q. 2, Pang and Narc, only ran on the 128K. The vast majority of Ocean's later games were also 128K-only, and other publishers followed suit with titles like Golden Axe (Virgin), Gauntlet 3 (US Gold), Rodland (Storm) and Lemmings (Psygnosis) all appearing exclusively for the 128K. By 1991, the fondly remembered Spectrum 48K had all but been phased out, and the 128K games that for years had failed to make an impression were now the norm.

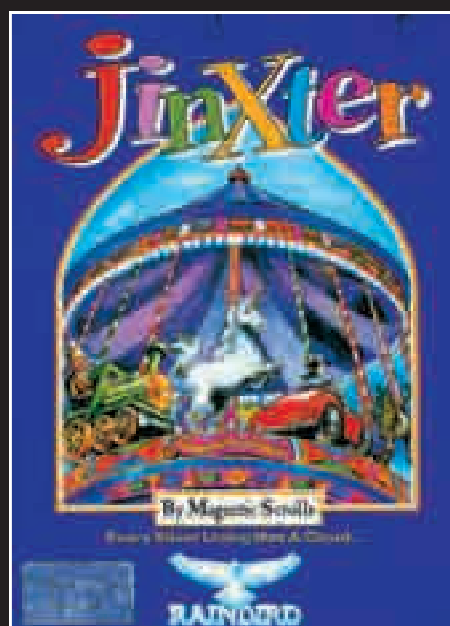
›Disk-based blues

In 1987, Amstrad gave Spectrum owners another upgrade option. The Spectrum +3 was essentially a +2 with a disk drive rather than a tape deck. However, the high launch price of £250 and Amstrad's preferential support of the non-standard 3in disk format used by its own CPC and PCW models, put an end to any hopes of a bright future for disk-based gaming.

The collection of games that Amstrad bundled with the +3 didn't help matters. Again, they were all old Ocean games, but they were even less impressive than the games given away with the 128. The free disk contained five games – NOMAD, Mailstrom, Gift from the Gods, Cosmic Wartoad and Daley Thompson's Super-Test. In a bizarre move, they were all 48K versions, even Super-Test which we know had already been updated for the 128.

Over the next three years most publishers supported the +3, but tape remained the format of choice. The obvious benefit of buying disk versions of the latest games was that they loaded in seconds not minutes, and the loading of additional levels was quick and painless – no more "Press Play on Tape" messages interrupting the game flow. In games like Gauntlet, in which you had to load each set of dungeons separately, this was clearly the future!

Despite the potential of the disk format – fast, random access loading would surely allow for more complex games – very few publishers created gaming products purely for the +3. One company that did was Magnetic Scrolls, and several of its adventures appeared exclusively on the +3 disk. The first was Guild of Thieves in 1988. This was then quickly followed by Jinxter, Fish!, and Myth. Surprisingly, these adventures were still text only and didn't feature any of the location graphics from the 16-bit versions. Still, the games often included over 100 detailed locations, and if you were a +3 owner it was about as close to bragging rights as you were ever going to get.



›A timeless classic...







Where Time Stood Still was without doubt one of the best games ever to grace the Spectrum, and the fact that it was a 128K-only title made it an extra special treat for those who had upgraded from the original rubber-keyed wonder. Developed by Denton Designs, the game was a pseudo-sequel to The Great Escape but instead of trying to flee a German POW camp, your aim was simply to survive in a primitive world of dinosaurs and flesh-eating tribesmen.

The story begins with a plane crash, from which all four passengers manage to escape with their lives. Taking control of Jarret, the pilot, you have to gather the group together and lead them to safety. Which is easier said than done, as perils lie around every corner. If you manage to avoid the falling boulders and prehistoric swamp monsters, there are rampaging T-Rexs and dive-bombing pterodactyls to run away from. To further complicate matters, members of the group will quickly become tired and need to rest, leaving you vulnerable to attack.

There are a serious of scripted events to contend with too. The rickety bridge you cross at the beginning of the game will always give when chubby Clive crosses it, and if you haven't brought the rope with you, the poor fellow will slip into the ravine below. Later, as you climb the mountain path, a strange oversized hand will emerge from a hole in the cliff face and push you to your death. You can keep the hand at bay by giving it a piece of meat, but first you must do a deal with the chief tribesman. He has some ham, but he'll only trade it for one of your items. So it's not all about running and hiding, as there's a basic puzzle element involved too.

The game world is impressively large and the scrolling isometric view is amazing. Although it's thought that Ocean did create a 48K version, it's hard to imagine how – you get the impression that this game pushes even the 128 to its limits. The only downside is that the game ends rather abruptly when you reach the safety of a cave on the other side of the river. But then, all good things must come to an end, and Where Time Stood Still remains one of the finest graphic adventure games ever released for the Spectrum. And yes, in 1988 it was perhaps the best reason for owning a 128.



Continuing our focus on film licences, Richard Hewison looks at the history of games based on movies, and provides a first-hand account on the trials and tribulations of bringing a big-screen blockbuster to home computers…

Every major film studio has a licensing division, and 30 years ago, these divisions concentrated on the more traditional licensing platforms like T-shirts, lunchboxes, books, toys, soundtracks and so on. Some studios only had one or two people working in licensing, as it wasn't considered a big part of the business. Only after the phenomenal success of the merchandising for *Star Wars* did studios realise how important licensing products could be.

When games publishers first started approaching the film studios in the early 1980s, the studios only felt the need to approve the packaging and advertising issues related to official logos, artwork and static images. Most of the licensing divisions had no real interest in the actual games back then, because the technology wasn't sufficiently advanced to infringe on their traditional areas of expertise, like voice-overs, recognisable actor likenesses, scripting, filming and music.

Early licensed games like Mattel's Tron titles and Atari's E.T. (for the Atari VCS) taught the games industry a few valuable lessons, one of them being that film licences can be both a blessing and a curse to those involved. Games publishers can ride on the publicity of the film to help promote the game, but developers often have to struggle with the creative straightjackets they are shackled with as a result.

Ghostbusters!

Star Wars games aside (see last month's magazine for a round-up of the early Star Wars games), Activision had perhaps the first really successful film-licensed videogame back in 1984, thanks to a chance meeting between two old colleagues from the record industry. Sharing the same flight in first class was a representative from Columbia Pictures and Activision's President, Greg Fischbach. Columbia was just about to release Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters* in cinemas across North America. It was a classic example of being in the right place at the right time, and knowing the right people no doubt helped as well.

David Crane was one of Activision's founders. He had literally just seen *Ghostbusters* the day before the deal was signed, and immediately went out and watched the film a second time to gather ideas. What he came up with was a design that contained a number of different elements, including an overhead Pac-Man-style maze chase game through the streets of New York, a driving section, a sub-game in which you had to trap ghosts (*don't cross the streams!*), and a climatic battle with the Stay Puffed Marshmallow Man. The game also included a small amount of resource management, with the player receiving payment for catching ghosts and spending the money on equipment upgrades. In fact, the idea of having more than one









David Crane's Ghostbusters was a huge hit, paving the way for a multitude of movie-licensed games

style of gameplay was so successful that most film-licensed titles that followed it adopted the same approach.

Both the film and the game were a huge success. The game was simple, but strangely addictive. Not only did it contain the instantly recognisable Ghostbusters logo, but it also had the attention-grabbing speech on the title screen that yelled "Ghostbusters! Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!", as well as "He slimed me!" elsewhere in the game. Originally developed for the 8-bit home computers, including the Apple II, Commodore 64, Sinclair Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, the game was later converted to the Atari 2600, the Nintendo Entertainment System and the Sega Master System.

Activision's newly opened UK operation oversaw the development of the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC conversions of Ghostbusters for the UK market, and then proceeded to publish a number of other film licences throughout the 1980s (mostly via its Electric Dreams label), including games based on *Aliens*, *Predator*, *Back to the Future*, *Big Trouble in Little China*, *Howard the Duck* and *Labyrinth*.

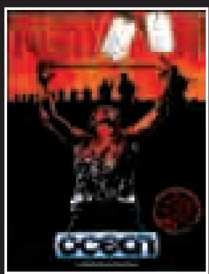
Wheeling and dealing

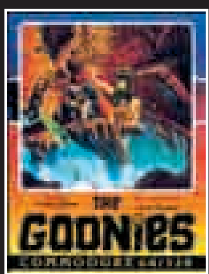
In the early-to-mid 1980s, publishers learned which movies were in development via the Hollywood grapevine. They then contacted the studio's licensing department to enquire about the availability of the licence. Film-licensed games were an expensive business, which is why only the larger software publishers usually got involved. The risk and initial expenditure was big, but potentially so were the rewards if it was done right.

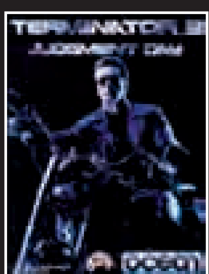
Getting a script for a film in development always involved publishers having to sign a non-disclosure/confidentiality agreement. Most studios would then send an individually marked copy of the shooting script to the publisher, so that it could be assessed. A few of the big players in Hollywood (eg Steven Spielberg's Amblin) would not allow scripts out of their grasp until a publishing deal was signed, sealed and delivered. This meant that a publisher's representative would often have to read the script on the studio lot, usually chaperoned by a studio



›Born in the UK







Besides Activision, a handful of other UK-based publishers were particularly aggressive at chasing film licences throughout the 1980s. The main culprits included Ocean, US Gold, Domark and Mirrorsoft.

Ocean Software published a large number of games based on movies, including Batman, Robocop, Cobra, Platoon, Highlander, The Neverending Story, Rambo, Short Circuit, Top Gun, Terminator 2, and The Untouchables, to name just a few. US Gold published a handful of games based upon the second and third *Indiana Jones* movies, *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker*, and conversions of Data East's Goonies platform game.

Domark grabbed the James Bond license and released a series of dodgy 007 games, including A View to a Kill, The Living Daylights and The Spy Who Loved Me. It also brought the Star Wars coin-op trilogy to home computers. Mirrorsoft, meanwhile, initially published the Biggles game of the film of 1986. A few years passed before it tried again, this time targeting major Hollywood blockbusters and creating games of *Back to the Future 2* & *3*, *Alien 3*, *Terminator 2* and *Predator 2*.

executive or secretary.

Publishers that were allowed to have copies of a script would read it to determine if the story contained enough key sequences that could be incorporated into a game. More often than not, this would involve passing the script to the development department, where key personnel (consisting of project managers and testers) would assess it, break it down into potential game elements and give their opinion on the script in general.

Assuming that the publisher wanted to proceed, a deal would then be negotiated. A typical deal between a studio and a publisher involved the publisher committing to a guaranteed minimum number of units sold, paying an advance, and negotiating a per-unit royalty fee. If the guarantee asked for by the studio was considered large, this was sometimes negotiated to only come into effect once the film had made a certain amount of money (usually based on US-box office takings).

During negotiations, most publishers would already be thinking ahead to the game's development. Their review of the script and the game possibilities would normally be sent out to at least two or three preferred developers, who would also have to sign a confidentiality agreement with the publisher. By this stage, a producer would have already been nominated by the publisher to look after the project.

Once the deal with the studio was signed, a decision then had to be made by the publisher about the developer, who would have submitted its own ideas in a specification document, complete with suggested development milestones and a total quote for the work. The final decision would be based on the developer's availability, its track-record to date, the ideas it wished to bring to the game, its quote and its ability to hit deadlines.

Against the clock

If a deal was signed near the start of the actual film production, then the developer might have a year to get the game finished, or maybe 18 months if they were really lucky. However, you have to remember that back in the late 1980s, there were far too many formats to cater for, including the 8/16-bit computers and all the PC flavours (CGA, EGA, MCGA, Hercules, Tandy 1000, and monochrome graphics cards, along with all the various soundcards). The early 90s might have seen the decline of the home computers, but it also saw the rise of the consoles, including Sega's Megadrive and GameGear, and Nintendo's GameBoy and SNES.

Quite often, specific game versions were sub-contracted to other developers who specialised in those formats. This obviously complicated matters even further, as the other developers would often rely on graphics, code and other elements to come from the lead version, which was usually the Amiga or PC by the turn of the 1990s. A delay on the lead version would obviously have a knock-on effect on the others.

At regular stages during the game's development, video recordings of the 16-bit versions and disks (containing graphics) would be organised and posted by the producer to the film studio for approval. As the game got closer to the release date, the publisher's marketing department would also send proposed advertising, box artwork and publicity items in the same parcel.

In return, the studios would often send parcels back across the Atlantic that would contain dozens of 35mm colour slides in large wallets, showing publicity and on-set photographs from the movie during principal photography. Once in a while they would also send converted VHS tapes (from NTSC to PAL), showing early trailers and other publicity featurettes. Sometimes, revised shooting scripts would also be sent, along with storyboards. All were strictly confidential and were not allowed to be



photocopied without permission from the studio.

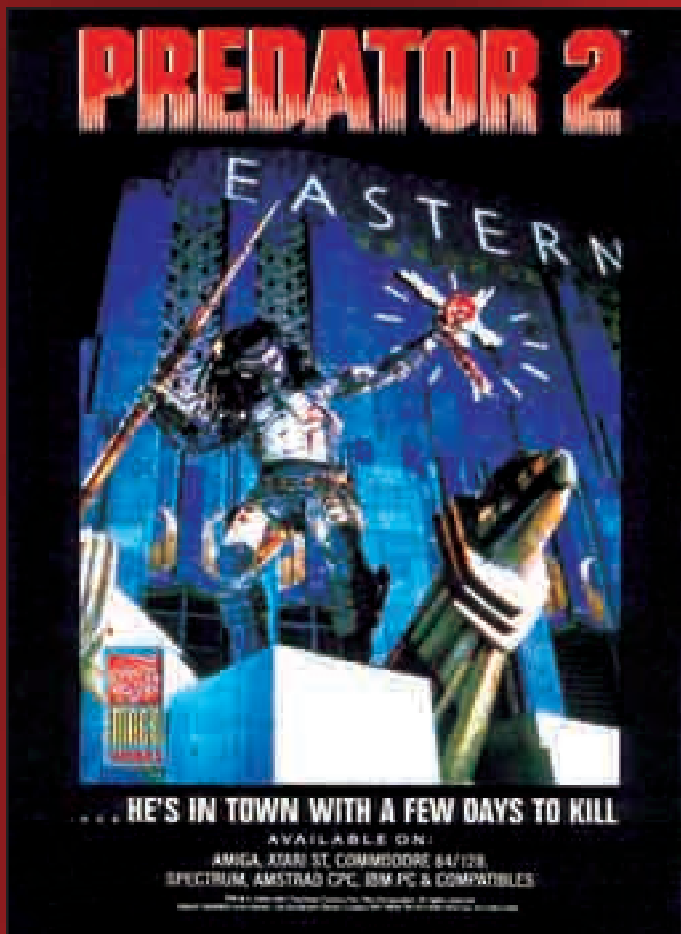
Due to the various European formats, the Hollywood studios would usually only show interest in the versions that were relevant to the US market, therefore excluding formats like the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Atari ST (the latter of which only had a small market share in the US, even when it was at its peak). Therefore, any comments on the game were usually directed at the Amiga, PC and console versions (where applicable).

Comments were usually faxed from the studio to the publisher, and it was then down to the game's producer to circulate them to the developer(s). Some of the copyright holders exercised a lot more creative control over the game's content than others, right down to whether the correct colour was being used on a character's clothing, for example.

One great perk that came with working on a film licence (other than getting to read or see information about a movie before its general release) was the chance to visit the actual film sets during production. If the movie was being filmed in the UK (at Pinewood, Elstree or Shepperton Studios in the south, for example), UK publishers and developers were sometimes granted permission to go and see the film being made. The official reason for the visit would be to let them see the sets, actors and costumes close up in a way that 35mm slides and VHS tapes couldn't replicate. Unofficially, it was just a great experience to say you had been on the set of a movie!

›Producing Predator 2

Richard produced 1991's Predator 2 game for Mirrorsoft's Image Works label. Here he reveals the full story behind the game's difficult development



Mirrorsoft signed Predator 2 in 1990, at a point when the film studio (20th Century Fox) hadn't completely given up on getting Arnold Schwarzenneger to star in the movie. In the end, they went with Danny Glover and a script that didn't involve any of the characters from the original film.

It was decided fairly early on that the game would be a straightforward arcade shoot-em-up, as a number of key scenes from the movie (including the opening 10 minutes) involved gun battles in one form or another. The first suggested game design was based on the Operation Wolf arcade game, in which the player was always positioned in the centre of the screen and the locations scrolled by from right to left in front of them.

An alternative approach involved a split-screen, two-player game in which the player(s) were able to choose whether to play as Detective Harrigan (Danny Glover's character) or as the Predator. Each window would show a pseudo-3D environment where the player and their opponent would have to reach specific locations to gather useful objects before the other character got there first. If their paths crossed then battle would commence (either shooting or hand-to-hand), but they would also have to battle through various shoot outs en route that could slow them down.

Ultimately, the Operation Wolf approach was chosen, as it was the easiest to implement across all of the 8- and 16-bit formats. The console versions were managed by a different producer, and ended up with a different game design, this time loosely inspired by the Smash TV coin-op and deemed more suitable for the console market.

Arc Developments was quickly chosen as the developer for the computer versions. It had a proven track-record of producing solid arcade games in fairly short order (coin-op conversions of Crackdown and Forgotten Worlds had both been successful for US Gold), and it already had a





working relationship with Mirrorsoft. This helped a lot, as Arc could hit the ground running. Unfortunately, its PC and C64 coders weren't available, so Oxford Moebius and 221B were sub-contracted to convert for those respective formats.

Design duties

The Predator 2 game was split across four main locations from the movie. The first level was set in the streets of LA, during the gun battle between the police and the drug barons. The player had to survive the shoot out and reach the baron's main headquarters at the end of the level. The Predator remained cloaked (invisible) in the background scenery throughout the level. You would occasionally see his red laser target roaming the gangsters.

Weapon upgrades, ammo and body armour (for health) could be replenished by shooting these items as they scrolled past. Once in a while, a gangster would engage the player in hand-to-hand combat but this would only last for a few seconds. Innocent civilians would also find themselves in the heat of the battle, and the player had to ensure that they didn't shoot too many of them. If they did, Detective Harrigan's police badge was taken away and it was game over. If the player was hit too many times, his health would reduce to the point where Harrigan would be taken away in an ambulance, and it would be game over again. The reason for this slightly unsatisfying scenario was simple – Mirrorsoft was not allowed to depict Harrigan being killed. He didn't die in the movie, so he wasn't allowed to die in the game.

The second, third and fourth levels followed a similar pattern. Level two was set inside an ornate Egyptian-style penthouse, which contained skinned bodies hanging from the ceiling. Level three was based in the LA Subway and the final level took the player inside the Predator's spaceship. This was the only level in which the player got to see the Predator de-cloaked.

The style of game meant that the player only ever saw Danny Glover's character from behind. His body was outlined so you could see the background through him. This was useful for a number of reasons: it meant the player could still see enemies and items as they scrolled by directly in front of them, and it also meant that Mirrorsoft didn't have to worry about negotiating or paying additional fees for using Danny Glover's likeness in the game.

A decision was also made fairly early on in the game's development not to include Alan Silvestri's familiar Predator cue that featured in the film's musical score. Arc Developments therefore sub-contracted Justin Scharvona to compose a theme for the ST and Amiga versions. In hindsight, it was probably the wrong type of music for the game, but it was finished quite late and there wasn't really time to change it. Something that sounded similar in tone to the Predator theme would have been a much better choice.

Outfoxed

Graphics and videos of the game were being regularly sent to 20th Century Fox for approval, but near the end of development Mirrorsoft received an unexpected message from the studio to say that the producers of the movie weren't happy with the game! This caused a panic in the UK, as the studio had approved every stage up until the penultimate milestone. It transpired that the producers hadn't been shown anything up until near the end, and their gut reaction was that they didn't like it. Apparently, the studio's licensing department didn't even have a PC to view the disks that Mirrorsoft had been sending.

After everyone had calmed down, Fox relented and only a few changes were eventually made to the PC version. A static comic book-style introduction and conclusion was added to the US release (published by Konami) to book-end the arcade action. The frequency of the pick-ups (ammo, body armour, weapons) was also tweaked in an attempt to improve the overall gameplay across all versions.

The C64 version was developed in tandem with the ST and Amiga versions, as was the PC conversion (written by Oxford Moebius). The Spectrum and CPC versions were handled in-house by Arc Developments, and they were the last versions to be started. Various minor changes were made to the 8-bit versions based on hardware restrictions, yet the largely monochrome Spectrum conversion actually ended up looking and playing the best of the 8-bit versions.

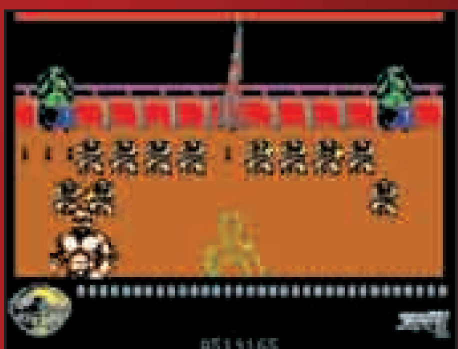
Although the *Predator 2* movie was originally scheduled for a May 1991 release in the US, 20th Century Fox pushed it forward to November 21st 1990 (Thanksgiving weekend). The European release was also brought forward a little, to early 1991. Thankfully, these changes

›Predator prologue

The ST and Amiga versions of Predator 2 were given an animated graphic introduction. This was mainly because Psygnosis had started the trend a few years earlier and most game-players expected 16-bit titles to have an introduction on bootup. The intro was storyboarded and based on the film's first proper trailer. Graphic artist Herman Serrano was hired to draw the screens, which had to include some rudimentary animation. Sound effects were sampled from the original Predator movie (taken from a sell-through VHS tape), including the unique 'Predator-vision' sound and the sound of the predator's shoulder-mounted laser gun firing. Arc Developments then coded and compressed the intro sequence to fit and run on floppy disk.



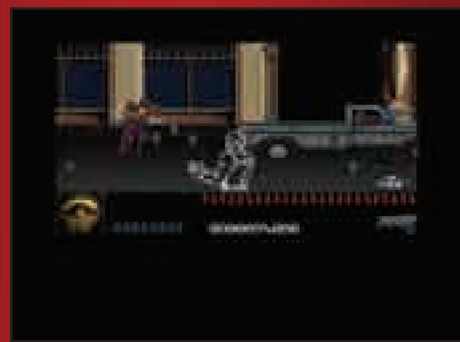


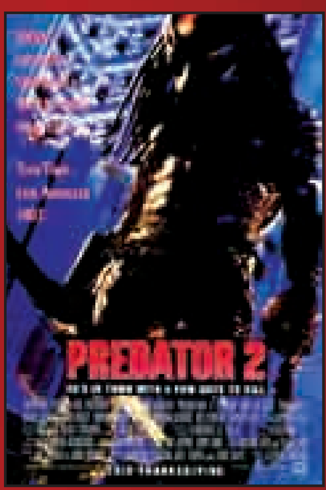
The Commodore 64 version, written by Sheffield-based developer 221b




Despite monochrome graphics, the Spectrum version was the best 8-bit version of the game




The Amiga version was the best-looking of the lot, with numerous on-screen sprites



The film was a disappointment, grossing just over $30 million in the US, half of the original's earnings

didn't affect the agreed completion dates for the game.

Unfortunately, US filmgoers tend to want family orientated movies at Thanksgiving and the run-in to Christmas, so *Predator 2* was never going to fill that niche. Some critics said that the film simply re-told the same story or that the audience had no empathy for any of the main characters. It was quickly labelled a lacklustre sequel and it failed to ignite the box office, earning considerably less than the original film.

The game also received lukewarm reviews from the magazines, especially for the 16-bit versions. Some magazines liked it, whilst some felt it was another example of a wasted film licence. The Spectrum version faired better, but the overall impression was still under-whelming.

Drawing conclusions

As producer of the Predator 2 game, most of the responsibility for its failings rested on my shoulders. In hindsight, I can now see where I should have done things differently. The style of game had already been chosen before I was given the project, and I really should have gone with my preferred choice (the split-screen chase and maze idea) because shoot-em-up arcade games simply weren't my forte. I was an adventure player at heart, and something that involved a little more thought was more to my liking. I never did like Operation Wolf-style games, and subconsciously that probably showed through more than I realised at the time.

Technically the title was OK, but not spectacular. As for the gameplay, there was no rush of adrenalin, no real addictive qualities to speak of. The game needed an 'against the clock' element that simply wasn't there. The only real incentive for the player was to battle on and finally encounter a visible predator, and possibly notch-up a high score along the way.

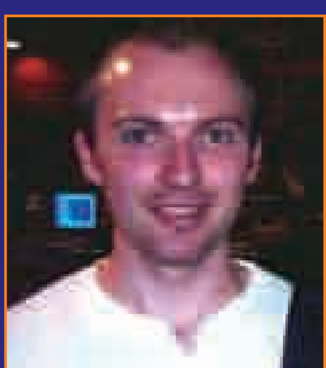
The lessons I learned have no doubt been experienced before by countless other producers working for countless other publishers over the years. It's a combination of choosing the right film, the right developer, the right producer and the right game design. Time and money are also big factors, as is the level of creative restraint that are put on the game itself by the film studio.

GTW

Games That Weren't

We can write about published games till our fingers fall off, but what about the long-lost games that were mentioned or even reviewed in magazines, only to roast in development hell and never to see the light of day? Well, one site is dedicated to tracking down these very games on the Commodore 64, and similar sites are springing up to cater for other formats. Welcome to the fascinating world of Games That Weren't. The hunt is on…

Did you know that Ultimate's Lunar Jetman was in development for the C64? Or that an alternative, much better conversion of R-Type exists for the C64, but it was scrapped to make way for Manfred Trenz's version? Or how about the alternative versions of Pang, Operation Thunderbolt and OutRun Europa? And were you aware that sequels were in development for many C64 classics, including Armalyte, California Games and Rainbow Islands?



Frank Gasking – GTW's founder

This is just a sample of some of the fascinating facts that can be found on Games That Weren't (**www.ozkan.co.uk/gtw**), a website dedicated to uncovering information about C64 games that were never released for whatever reason, with the ultimate aim being to source actual playable code. And there have been some notable successes – games that never got past preview stage have been located, resurrected and are now available to play many years later. In addition, the site is home to the stories behind the games, rare scans, exclusive downloads and programmer interviews.

So successful is the site that updates are now more regular than ever, and we've invited GTW's founder Frank Gasking to contribute news and reviews on a regular basis. As an introduction to his column, which begins from next month, we spoke to Frank about the history of site, his hopes concerning future finds, and the most interesting games that have been tracked down to date.

Retro Gamer: Welcome to RG Frank – it's good to have you aboard! Can you begin by telling us what inspired you to create GTW?

Frank Gasking: It all began when reading an article called 'That Was The Game That Wasn't' in *Commodore Force* magazine in the early 90s. It focused on a series of games that never saw the light of day. Most of the games looked awesome, and I was naturally curious to play them. This interest inspired me to write a feature called 'Games That Weren't' for Jason Mackenzie's *Commodore Zone* fanzine. In 1999, my friend Vinny Mainolfi convinced me to turn it into a webpage, and after several incarnations, it turned into the project it is today.

RG: What would you class as your first find of real note?

FG: Our first ever success story was when the author of Thalamus' Armalyte, Dan Phillips, emailed one day after reading our entry for Armalyte 2 and Deadlock. He coded these two games, and after some permission gaining, he gave us what remained of Armalyte 2 (which was small, but very interesting). This was the first big find, helping us build a reputation for actually *finding* lost games and not just talking about them. Deadlock was later released after negotiations.

RG: We guess that not all searches lead to success. Can you recall any particular 'close but no cigar' situations?

FG: We've had many, and still do sadly. Batman Returns is one particular game, scrapped when the C64 was a dying breed. It took years to track down the game's coder Roy Bannon (part of Denton Designs), and when we did finally find him at Virtuacraft, we were very hopeful. Sadly, after searching at his home, he found nothing. After being prompted to get in touch with John Heap and Ally Noble, we heard nothing back. Now the game is in limbo. Daffy Duck is another where we've practically asked every single



Frank's first success story – the lost remnants of Thalamus' Armalyte 2



The GTW site in its current form – nearly 100,000 visits since 2000

person involved with no luck. Only the boss of Hi-Tec, Dave Palmer, has a master disk with it on.

RG: Talking of development disks, some of those you've managed to uncover must be very old. Does the flimsy media usually hold up to years in storage?

FG: Although they don't look like much, the old 5.25in disks sometimes give the impression they're made out of steel (though sadly, my disks don't have as much luck). Solar Jetman was on a disk that was 14 years old, stuffed behind a radiator in a briefcase for about 12 years, and it still worked. More amazing is Martin Galway's Lunar Jetman code on a disk that was 20 years old, still working fine, along with all the other disks he uncovered for the guys at C64 Audio.

RG: How helpful are programmers when you enquire about development disks and the like?

FG: It varies between developers. Most programmers are keen to help, and even have a sift through their attics to find their old work again. Mostly you'll find they are quite flattered that someone remembers something they did 20 years ago, and are happy for it to gain some recognition today. On the flip side, there are developers that have moved on and don't wish to talk about the past (concentrating solely on the future and present), so either they politely tell you this, or you just don't get a reply back. Some developers also don't wish unfinished code to be released, and that's the way it is sadly.

RG: When you find games in an incomplete state, have you been tempted to try and put together the pieces in order to create a playable game?

FG: Yes, definitely! Although I cannot really do it myself, if anyone suggests a game to be finished off, then I'll encourage it. It's happened a few times with some games, one such being Super Pac Twins, finished off by Richard Bayliss the other year. Although not finished off as such, Firebird's Tyger Tyger was in pieces when it was found, and it took a set programmers to put it back together into something playable. There are a few other cases now like this where we have bits and pieces, and we try to arrange someone to put them together (watch this space!)

RG: Can you tell us more about your recent Lunar Jetman find? Has anything else special turned up lately?

FG: We never even knew Lunar Jetman existed or was in development for the C64. Jason Mackenzie came across one of Martin Galway's source disks, with Lunar Jetman written across it and a date. He sent me a copy and I ported the disk over to PC, then got Cyberwing's Jason Kelk to compile it for us. A very, very early preview was found. It's not every day an Ultimate prototype turns up, and one written by Martin Galway either!

We've also uncovered what was the official conversion of Troddlers, before another development team moved in and won the contract. This version was being written by the guys behind Lemmings on the C64, and is much more playable than the version that won the contract. It features about seven preview levels and two bitmap screens, and has never been seen before.

RG: What's your personal favourite find to date?

FG: Out of Solar Jetman, Deadlock and Tyger Tyger, I'll have to say Deadlock. Mainly because this game featured in the original Commodore Force article that inspired GTW, and the screenshots at the time made me desperately want to find what remained of it.

RG: What unreleased C64 games would you place at the top of your most wanted list?

FG: Daffy Duck (1992, Hi-Tec), Murder (1990, US Gold) and Search For Sharla (1989, Thalamus) in that order. I've been losing hair since trying to track these games down you know! These are the three that we get asked and pushed about most of the time. All have been close to being found, but they're still managing to elude us.

RG: And in your heart do you think they'll ever be found?

FG: I think eventually one or two might sneak out. But there will be at least one tragic loss out of them I think. Maybe we'll be lucky and find all three, but we'll see. We'll just keep trying until we get the final slap in the chops to say "Give in!"

RG: Are there any programmers you're desperate to contact? You never know, one might by reading this right now!

FG: You might regret that question! Here are a few developers, with games they *did* finish in brackets to help identify them: Peter Baron (Salamander), Mark Kelly (Turbo OutRun), Ally Noble (Shadowfire), Roy Bannon (World Class Rugby), Andrew Rodger (Alien 3), Mike Brown (Pro Tennis Tour), David Jolliff (Devastating Blow), Alan Botwright (Judge Dredd), Tiertex (Strider). There are loads more under the 'Where?' section on the website, so if anyone can help, then please feel free. Maybe someone can help us find them.

RG: Finally, have you thought about expanding GTW to cover games on other formats?

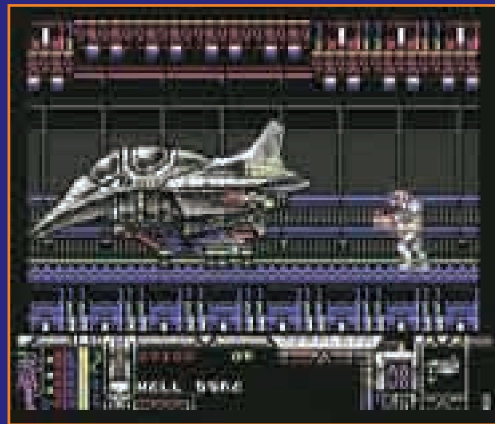
FG: Not personally – concentrating on just the C64 is enough work for me – but I'd like to see mirror sites done by other people for other systems. There are actually two GTW sites in development for the Amiga and recently one for the PC. If you look at the results we have had, and you want to locate lost games for your machine, then there is something here that might work for you. Maybe one day there will be some kind of combined GTW ring or something like that.

Top five finds

We asked Frank to select the five most important or interesting finds since he began the GTW project

Deadlock

A bit of a 'what if' game for many years, with all of us drooling over the diary shots of the game. It's gorgeous to look at and the concept was way ahead of its time. The developers argued about it being not very playable (which is really why it died), but it's still amazing to look at. It was wanted by many for years, so we got a lot of praise when it was released. And for it to actually be given to us by Dan Phillips was a really fantastic gesture.



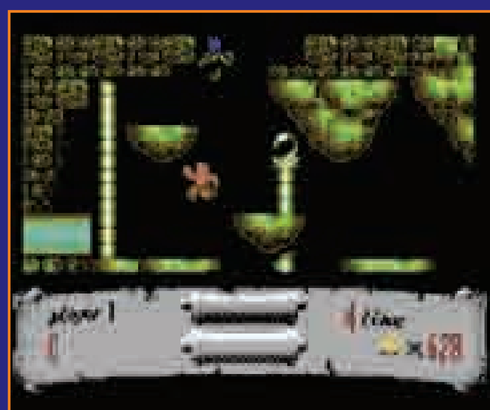
Solar Jetman

This has to be in the list mainly because we didn't know it existed until it turned up. And not only did it exist, but it was actually complete and fully playable! It was hardly mentioned in the magazines (*Zzap!64* once referred to it in a news snippit that said Storm was working on a C64 conversion of the NES original) and it was pure chance that the game's graphic man, Haydn Dalton, found the disks in an old briefcase. Luckily they worked first time too, from what was known as the only existing copy of it.



Tyger Tyger

This has been talked about for years, so it was a huge surprise when the author of Cronosoft's Reaxion, Jason Kelk, came forward with a PDS file that he was given years ago by Gary Liddon. We got a team of guys working on fitting together what was basically a million-piece jigsaw puzzle. There's plenty to see as it was about 50% complete, and it shows a lot of promise. Out of interest, the game was cancelled because it was a blatant clone of US Gold's Black Tiger.



Lunar Jetman

This was a very recent surprise – so recent it's not even been mentioned on the site yet! Again, it's a game that we didn't know existed. Jason Mackenzie (of the Binary Zone website) found the disk in Martin Galway's collection, and when the source code was compiled, an early preview of the game emerged with full score status panels, a main character and a few animated sprites. The dimensions were the same as the Spectrum version. There is some minimal control, but it's very buggy.



Tran

Created by Steve Collins, the author of Badlands and Herobotix on the C64, Tran never found a publisher and was forgotten about for many years. Steve wrote his own webpage and mentioned a few titles that never saw the light of day. After contacting him about the titles, he mentioned he may still have them on tape in his attic back in Ireland. Sure enough, he found Tran on a single tape... and bunged it in the post special delivery. Luckily it worked first time, and we managed to archive it.




CONTROL
&
CONQUER

Having wowed PC and console gamers during the early 90s, the Star Control universe now lies forgotten and neglected amongst copyright disputes, cash-in sequels and the charred remains of many an Ur-Quan Dreadnaught. As the series' 15th anniversary nears, John Szczepaniak treks through the archives to bring one of gaming's greatest treasures into the spotlight

In the beginning there was Star Control. Actually, in the *very* beginning there was Space War. Created in 1961 by MIT students, the goal was to pilot a spacecraft and shoot your opponent who was piloting a rival craft, while avoiding a gravity well at the centre of the display. Two ships, one wrap-around screen and a lot of blasting – it was revolutionary for many reasons, and not only because it was technically the first videogame ever devised. Zoom ahead nearly three decades, and in July 1990 you have the release of the first Star Control game on PC – the beginning of the series and all that goes with it.

Star Control was essentially the logical evolution of the original Space War. The developer, Toys For Bob, took everything that made Space War (and all great games in general) such a thrilling experience and used these elements as the basis for its own game. The inherent competitiveness of all human beings, conflict and victory, and intuitive and almost organic controls – all these elements that were originally present in the 1961 game were refined and greatly built upon to make Star Control the classic we still celebrate today.

Different gamers have different abilities, preferences and tastes, so while the original Space War only had two types of ship (whose differences were purely cosmetic), Star Control had 14 different varieties to choose from, each with their own very distinctive look and set of strengths and weaknesses. All had a main attack weapon as well as sub-weapons, ranging from a cloaking device and kamikaze-style suicide bombs to the ability to steal another ship's crew. Crew literally equalled ship health – if all the crew died the ship went boom. Balancing this out was a vessel's maximum energy amount and rate of charge – basically its ammunition for the main and sub-weapons.





Famous Battles of the Ur-Quan Conflict Volume IV? Well, if it worked for Star Wars...

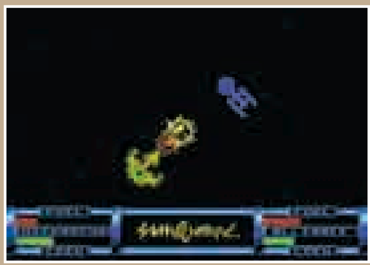


As well as these additions, the limitations of Space War were removed. Gone was the static screen, replaced instead by a free-flowing and scaling arena that actually moved with the action – zooming in when a player closed in for the kill, and only warping a craft around to the other side once the camera could no longer zoom out. By working on a 2D plane in such a way, controlling your vessel was made effortless and perfectly ergonomic. Up was always up and you could always see where the enemy was and what they were doing. The biggest setback in modern 3D gaming, especially in genres such as this, is the problem of viewpoint – visualising the game world in a way that helps rather than hinders the player. The combat in Star Control works well and is still enjoyable, even when compared to other recent games, precisely because it exists as a flat representation of space-based conflict. Modern space games that attempt 3D viewpoints have to battle with the problem of having action going on both in front and behind the player, while only being able to visually focus in one direction.

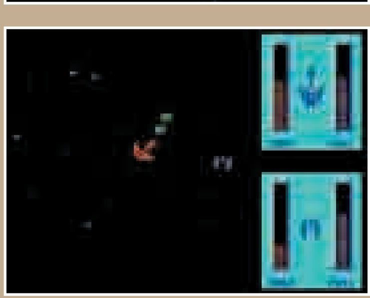
Plotting a course

Bolstering the one-on-one battles was an entire strategic campaign mode of missions and tactical star maps, supported, of course, by a suitable plot. Though basic (alien hierarchy attacks a friendly Alliance who fight back) and taking a rear seat to the action, it introduced the player to the many alien species that would later return, and was the seed from which the vastly expanded narrative found in Star Control 2 grew. It also avoided taking itself too seriously and paid homage to many sci-fi books and films with its ship designs, humorous character personalities and even the myriad of space captain names. There were also subtle details that made the game endearing and showed just how much hard work had been put into its development – for example, every ship action had a suitable cockpit animation to go

›Battle of the 8-bits







From top to bottom, Star Control on the C64, Amstrad and Spectrum

A stripped-down version of Star Control appeared on the Commodore 64, Spectrum and Amstrad. Of all the games ported to these three systems, Star Control has to be one of the laziest examples, mainly due to many easily avoided faults. Suffice to say that none of the original team were involved, because if they had been it would have retained the true essence of the original. Apart from having only eight vessels to choose from instead of 14, plus the expected and acceptable weaker visuals/audio, the games were incredibly unbalanced. There was no pause when a Dreadnaught fired, energy consumption was almost non-existent and while some ships ended up nearly invincible, others were next-to useless.

All of these problems could easily have been remedied, but it almost seems as if one 8-bit version was ported from another, retaining all the previous game's errors and then adding some more. Regardless of how things came about, the C64 version is the pick of the bunch, with bigger, more colourful visuals, minor screen scaling and far tighter control.



The Megadrive box art, based on the PC box art but painted by Boris Vallejo

with it, playing in the corner of the screen. It was these elements that gave Star Control 'soul'. Small effects and details are all too often taken for granted today, as development teams are now made up of hundreds of employees and spend millions of pounds on development. Despite the high production values, many such modern titles have a slight banality to them, and even their overall sheen lacks any real charm.

The Campaign mode also managed to combine another genre with an already excellent game – this would become a recurrent trend for Toys For Bob as most of its titles would end up crossing the genre boundaries, defying classification and always giving the player something fresh to experience. In Star Control, the player had to deal with tactical positioning, ore mining, defence micromanagement, and ship manufacturing during each campaign. Ships cost resources and resources had to be mined, during which an enemy vessel would slowly approach. Though some complained about the rotating star map, the two genres were brilliantly combined, making for a finely balanced and well-rounded gaming experience that catered both for those wanting quick action and those willing to spend time working through longer missions.

Overall, Star Control is a textbook example of good game design. All of its separate components can be stripped down to their barest essentials, and are in some way connected to the very nature of human behaviour. As such, Star Control becomes a reflection of what we are as games players and human beings. Strip the veneer off many modern games and what you are left with is the same player-versus-opponent mechanics, whether that opponent is computer controlled or your best friend.

Star Control was a considerable success and was ported to several different platforms, including various 8-bit computers. It was also ported to the Amiga (a version that was nearly identical to the original), as well as the Sega Megadrive, on which the game was actually improved. While the PC and Amiga versions only had nine campaign missions in them, the Genesis version had an extra six, making a grand total of 15 very different space operas to participate in – this doubles when you consider the fact that there are two sides to choose from in each. Which was another highlight of Star Control – it gave you the ability to play as the enemy and annihilate the allied forces of good if you chose to.

Although plenty of well-earned praise can be lavished on this game, this is nothing compared to what can be said about the sequel that would eventually follow.

Second's best

Rather than simply sell itself on the good name of what had gone before, Star Control 2 chose to re-invent itself in an almost revolutionary manner. It was a product born not out of focus groups, deadlines or corporate will, but rather the blood and sweat of its creators, and a determination to fulfil an artistic vision that would end up having to be funded by themselves for the last six months of development. In an ironic twist of fate it would also be the least profitable of all Toys For Bob's titles, despite its massive cult following.

Since its inception, the series has been given nearly 30 different awards for gaming excellence, with the majority going to Star Control 2. The reason for this praise lies partly in the perfect unity of multiple genres – the instant gratification found in the melee combat balanced out against the more cerebral and lasting adventure-based narrative sections (which contain further sub-genres). And narrative is the operative word in that sentence, since to merely group it with so many clichéd or lacking 'videogame plots' would be to do it a major disservice. The scripting in Star Control 2 is exemplary, and gives a healthy nod to countless sci-fi influences, while at the same time adding something new, making the writing unique. It's also backed by a fitting soundtrack that manages to convey various moods, enveloping the player at precisely the right moments.

While some critics are happy to claim that emotional manipulation has only recently been used in games, Star Control 2 has been doing it for years. No one who has completed the epic saga can deny that it affected them on an emotional level – everything from the strong humour evident throughout to the feelings of loss experienced as later details are revealed, manages to stir up emotion in even the coldest of player. The game covers the entire spectrum of human thought and feeling.

But Star Control 2 didn't just rely on its atmospheric scripting – it reinforced these meticulously planned-out races and cultures with a free roaming, non-linear and varied universe of stars to explore, one that would be the envy of many other games.





Communications and alien diplomacy play a big part in Star Control 2, as do the scantily clad Syreen

Which is another standard the game set, because while there had been non-linear games before (especially space fairing ones), Star Control 2 improved on all of them by pulling it off with a certain panache and ease of use that made everything feel seamless. It avoided clunky menus and took a direct hands-on approach to controlling both the planet lander and main craft, ensuring there was nothing to break the sense of immersion – everything felt natural and intuitive. There was always something to do and all of it was tuned in such a way that it was always satisfying, whether it was plodding around a planet's surface shooting small animals or taunting one of more than 20 alien species that you could converse with.

Those hungry for action were also catered for with the return of ship-vs-ship battles, which had been refined and boasted a massively expanded 25-ship roster to choose from. Again, each had its own strengths and weaknesses, but this time with more finely balanced traits. Unlike in the previous game, in which some ships had major advantages over others, the vessels were more evenly matched, making for more close-cut, longer-lasting and exciting battles. When two expert players took to melee mode it was almost like two skilled swordsmen engaged in a duel. The thrill of a gravity whip hurling you past an opponent to the sound of heavy cannons and fusion blasts as both closed in for the kill, made for some very memorable multiplayer moments.

The power of Panasonic

One of the biggest features, though, would not be included until several months after its initial release, when Toys For Bob ported the game to Panasonic's 3DO system, complete with the lengthy, extremely high-quality voice acting for every piece of alien dialogue. Every section of spoken communication was given a complete overhaul thanks to the addition of speech. While other early forays into CD-based gaming were focusing on FMV-based interaction, Toys For Bob was doing what many should have done – it was taking an already amazing game and enhancing it by using the CD storage for dialogue and remixing the soundtrack. Suddenly everything had a much greater gravitas and an almost unparalleled sense of atmosphere. Those who have played it can attest to the absolute dread caused by hearing in-depth explanations of what it's like to wear a 'pain excruciator' for months on end! And the Yehat explanation of the demise of a fellow species must stand as one of the few (if not the only) examples of voice acting being able to reduce people to tears, and this is several years before the overused death of Aeris in Final Fantasy VII that people often hold aloft as an emotional example.

While being the ultimate version of Star Control 2, partly because it turned a 3DO into the perfect dedicated melee machine, it was not without a few faults that crept in during the porting process. Gone were the hilarious alien outtakes from the PC credits, simply because Toys For Bob didn't remember them until it was too late. Some of the better pieces of scripting were also curiously missing. As for the alteration of the original's hand-drawn intros and endings to CG FMV, fans are still divided on the subject.

More interesting still is the fact that there was also a Japanese version of the 3DO game, which was fully dubbed, as Fred Ford (one of the game's creators) tells us: "The Japanese 3DO version of Star Control 2, if you understand Japanese, is probably pretty bizarre because nobody who tested the game had any idea if the translated text and speech either matched or conveyed the humour and subtlety of the content."

Open Source Star Control

And that's not all in terms of ports because in August 2002 Toys For Bob released the partially ported sources of Star Control 2, 3DO version, to the fan community – "For good karma," as they put it. Ultimately, this would result in Star Control 2 being available as an Open Source project, which can be found at **http://sc2.sourceforge.net**. The name has had to be changed to The Ur-Quan Masters though, because Toys For Bob no longer own the trademark 'Star Control'.

As this dedicated group of people declare: "Our goal is to port this wonderful game to current personal computers and operating systems. It is and will remain 100% free of charge, and anyone can contribute to the project and thus help make it even better." Toys For Bob should be commended for such a move – while Japanese games corporations would appear to want every creation of theirs to go up in smoke rather than freely downloadable, this small Californian group has seen fit to grace the gaming world with one of its finest achievements, and at no cost.

Describing anymore of the finer points of Star Control 2 to a newcomer would be to destroy that most magical first completion and the discovery of everything as new. To describe it to someone who has played the game would only be covering what has been experienced several times already. Mere written words in an article can never come close to conveying the sheer thrill of experiencing Star Control 2. The only way to understand what people feel when they talk about the game is to play it through to the grand finale with full voice acting.

It's with good reason then, that *Retro Gamer* is proud to present this month's coverdisc, which includes The Ur-Quan Masters PC/Mac port of the improved 3DO version, complete with bonus-material add-ons and remixed music by the original MOD artists who made them. So go forth and live the life of a star captain, letting it take over your mind if only for a short time.



The journey continues...
Next month we speak to Star Control's creators, Paul Reiche III and Fred Ford, and look beyond The Ur-Quan Masters at Star Control 3 and the unreleased fourth game in the series, StarCon.

STRANGE GAMES

The moral debate surrounding videogaming will probably never be resolved. In one camp you have the mothers insisting videogames have made little Shaun kill his canary. In the other you have gamers pointing out that if we were really that influenced by gaming, we would all be kicking turtles around and looking for princesses by now. But an issue that rarely pops up in this debate is taste. Forget violence and bad language for a second, let's look at all the games that have done their part toward corroding our cultural heritage, literature and film art. Per Arne Sandvik rounds up the top offenders and finds them all guilty

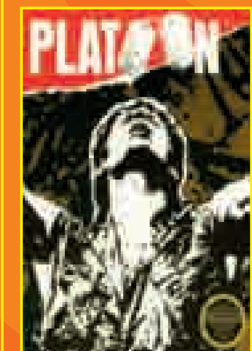
›The Godfather

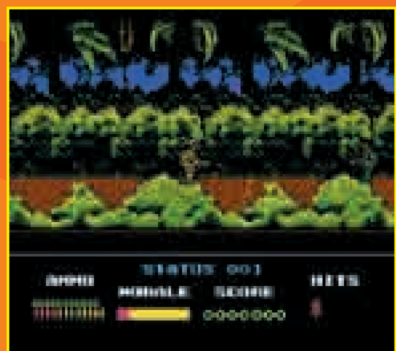
Amiga/ST/PC

We all laughed heartily when EA recently announced that it was planning to make a GTA-style crime sim 'inspired by' Mario Puzo's book and Francis Ford Coppola's film. But then, EA is only following in the footsteps of US Gold, who released a Godfather game back in 1991 (to tie-in with the release of the third film, no less). Subtitled 'The Action Game' (there's a clue right there), this 16-bit charade almost shows contempt for the original source material, turning the epic saga of Vito Corleone's 'family business' into a side-scrolling shoot-em-up! Forget mafia 'hits', this is full-on gang warfare. There are even Operation Wolf-style mini-games between each level. Horse's head? Horse's arse more like...









›Platoon

NES

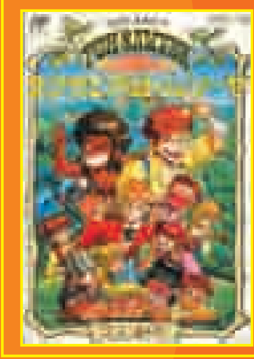
A movie about the horrors of a war that was declared by the United States without real justification. Translated into an 8-bit NES game? How could it possibly go wrong. Here's how: to anyone who hasn't seen Oliver Stone's film, this is a game about a single man's rampage through Vietnam. Charlie Sheen is portrayed as something closer to Schwarzenegger's character in *Commando*, rather than the tormented soldier he plays in the film. It's a good thing, then, that the last boss is Tom Berenger's insane sergeant and not a giant Vietnamese general whose only weak point is the inside of his fire-breathing mouth.

›Tom Sawyer

NES

Tom Sawyer features not once but twice in this list. This particular version from Square is not a platformer, but rather an RPG set in a Japanese town in the state of Mississippi (!). It's somewhat difficult to understand the narrative of the game due to the dialogue being half English and half Japanese (sometimes shifting between the two as often as twice a sentence), but like the other Tom Sawyer game it has something to do with killing dinosaurs.

The language issue could lead you to assume that this game will be a bastion of multicultural understanding and a milestone on the map towards a united Earth. But then L'om joins your party. To call L'om 'black' would be like calling a nuclear explosion 'kind of brightish'. It is quite possible that the only thing blacker in the entire universe is a cosmic occurrence from which neither mass nor light can escape. His lips cover about half his face, with the rest of his appearance consisting of curly hair and a patch of black skin. The only evidence that L'om has eyes are small glimmers of reflected light.



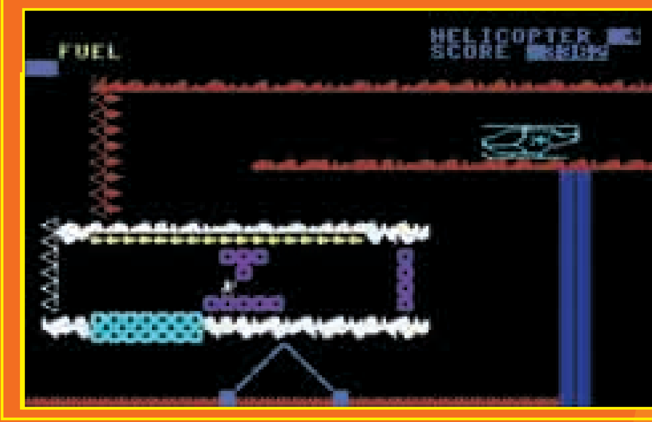


Apocalypse Now

Commodore 64

Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* doesn't really wear its message on its sleeve, but one could argue that it's mainly about how man at his core is a primitive being. The vessel for this theme is a boat that travels up a river to the heart of darkness until it reaches its destination, where Brando's war criminal Kurtz and his followers have fashioned a culture so crude it's reminiscent of the Stone Age.

Of course, there are also helicopters in this film, which makes for a much more action-packed game. That is, if your idea of an action-packed game is an impossible mess in which you navigate a chopper through a narrow maze while praying you won't lose all your lives before reaching the end of the first corridor. But before that happens, you will run out of gas and have to go back and refuel, at which point you will be dead. The game isn't even remotely connected to the film and puts the 'sty' in 'travesty'.

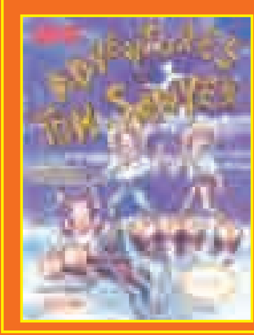


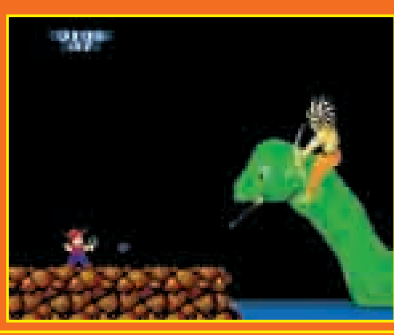
›The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

NES

Playing games based on books is a great way to get the full story without actually having to read. An example is Seta's Tom Sawyer, a gripping tale of a young boy who kills giant octopi and rainbow-coloured monster gorillas with his slingshot before the final showdown against a Native American chief riding a brontosaurus. With some help from his leprechaun friend, of course.

Given more thought, it might be possible to make a decent Tom Sawyer game. Bonus levels in which you trick your friends into white-washing fences for you could be a nice alternative to the car-smashing bit in Street Fighter II, and a steamboat race down the river could also be a clever twist on the conventional racing game. But you can't make a game based on a Mark Twain book without social commentary. Twain without social commentary is like… a computer without a screen or… a printer without paper or… searching for a simile without bothering to look at the part of the room that's behind you.





›Radio Flyer

SNES – never released

You have to ask yourself what Ocean was thinking when this 1992 property was optioned. *Radio Flyer* was never a high-profile release, so the name alone could not guarantee returns. What's even more mind-boggling is the fact that the company failed to see how tasteless this whole business would have turned out if the game had ever been released.

For those unfamiliar with the movie's plot, here's a short summary. The story is told in retrospect by Tom Hanks and revolves around his character as a young boy. He and his brother live alone with their mother until a stepfather shows up one day. The 'radio flyer' is a cart the boys receive as a gift from the stepfather, and throughout the movie they work on turning it into an aeroplane.

So far, so good. Making a Pilotwings-like game from this premise is a bit unconventional, but not outright absurd. The problem is, this is really a story about child abuse, and the homemade plane serves as a metaphor for the children's longing to escape the terrors at home. Take away the adventure elements the main character weaves into the story to help him cope with what he has been through, and you're left with a heartbreaking story about the darkness that sometimes hides behind white picket fences. So let's see how many glowing hoops we can fly through before the timer runs out!



Retro Scene

The latest news from the glorious, ever-growing retro scene, brought to you by the benevolent *Retro Gamer*

CGE UK on the move

CGE UK organiser Chris Millard has announced that the location and date of this year's event have been changed. Originally to take place at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon (the same venue as last year) at the end of June, the show will be held in conjunction with GameZone Live (formerly GameStars Live), and will now take place between 1–4 September 2005 at the Excel exhibition centre in London's docklands. This is excellent news for the show, as GameZone Live is a massive consumer event, with an estimated 100,000 people attending over the four-day event. Hopefully it will be as successful as last year's E3 show, in which guys from the CGE US show staged a retro exhibition.

In other news, Chris has announced that several new special guests will be attending the show. In addition to those already confirmed (Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean and Jeff Minter), a number of ex-Ocean programmers will be coming along, including Mark R Jones, Simon Butler and Bill Harbison, webmaster of the fantastic Ocean Experience website (**www.theoceanexperience.co.uk**). Also in attendance will be Andy Nuttall, who used to write for *Amiga Format* and *The One* magazines, and is now part of the team as Bullfrog. And of course, *Retro Gamer* will be along for the ride.

Tickets will be available from May 1. For the latest CGE UK information, visit the website at **www.cgeuk.com**.



This year's CGE UK will take place at London's Excel exhibition centre

Matt's back!

Regular readers will remember that we recently promised not to keeping banging on about Matthew 'Jet Set' Smith. Well, that's all about to go right out of the window as Matt has announced that he's working on a new game. *A new Spectrum game!*



When he's not playing Space Invaders, Matt Smith is working on a brand new Spectrum game!

Speaking to *Retro Gamer*'s Paul Drury at the recent Screenplay Festival, Matt revealed: "I've started coding the engine for a new Spectrum game, and I've actually done a lot of the artwork." Fans immediately wanted to know if he was referring to the long-rumoured Miner Willy Meets the Taxman, but Matt revealed that the Miner Willy character is now owned by Advanced Mobile Solutions, so the intrepid explorer won't be starring in the new game. But he hinted that it may happen, if an agreement could be reached with the new publishers.

There will be a full report from the Screenplay Festival in next month's magazine. In the meantime, you can read a transcript of Paul's interview at **www.redkeyreddoor.com**.

Four-player fun

The C64 developer and publisher Protovision is putting the finishing touches to its game Tanks 3000, which will allow four simultaneous players when Protovision's four-player adaptor is plugged into the back of the C64.

This little gem of a game is a single-screen top-down shooter containing 10 battlefields and many power-ups for players to fight for. The idea behind the game is simple: manoeuvre your tank to avoid the incoming fire whilst sneaking up to obliterate the opponents. For more information, head over to **www.protovision-online.com**.



Keeping tabs on Cronosoft

Cronosoft's Simon Ullyatt has made some subtle suggestions regarding a possible future game release. Apparently Simon has found inspiration in an old Oric programming manual he happened to be reading, and now a new Oric game is now in development!

Due for release next though is Platform Game Designer for the Spectrum by the prolific Jonathan Cauldwell. This package will come in two forms, allowing users to develop either screen-by-screen games similar to Jet Set Willy or single-screen Manic Miner-style games. Both versions are expected to sell at £4.99 each, plus postage, with the prospect



of it being ported from the Spectrum to other machines. More news will be announced shortly at **www.cronosoft.co.uk**

Introducing Retro Soft

Cronosoft, Protovision and other retro publishers have been joined by a new software label. Run by Paul Andrews, Retro Soft has big plans to launch new software across many formats, including the C64, Amstrad CPC and PCW, Atari ST, Amiga and Spectrum. Although it's still in its infancy, the site is up and running and Paul is on the look out for programmers who need an outlet for their developments. If you have something you've written and would like to see it released, why not head over to the site at **www.retro-soft.co.uk** and get in touch with Paul?



Watch this space – new games are soon to be announced from Retro Soft

Programming by numbers

Course Technology/Premier Press has launched its latest publication, *Retro Game Programming: Unleashed for the Masses*. This book, part of Andre Lemothe's bestselling *Game Programming* series, covers everything from setting up vintage computers through to advanced graphic and sound routines. Accompanying the book will be a dedicated website where readers can download audio and visual tutorials. Any finished games can then be uploaded to the site to sell or trade if they so choose. It's the first book of its type in over a decade, and the current edition will support the 6502-based Apple II, Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit machines, as well as Tandy's TRS-80 and CoCo 2

The book is currently available from Amazon and other good stockists from March 22. For more information contact **retrocode@hotmail.com**.

From Russia with love

Russian enthusiast Zhabin Alexei is developing yet another Spectrum clone. The Spectrum is one of the best-loved computers in Eastern Europe thanks to the mass of unofficial clones that sprung up throughout the 80s. This new machine, called the Pentagon 1024SL, is seen by many as a replacement for the Peter Plus Sprinter SP2000, a machine that has sadly been recently shelved.

This new machine will have all of the advanced features that you'd expect from a Russian clone, as well as a near 100% backwards compatibility with the original machines and some other clones (such as the Scorpion and the original Pentagon machines). The website can be found at **www.pentagon1024.narod.ru**.

2600 homebrew

All-round-nice-guy and 6502-programmer Simon Quernhorst is working away on a port of the C64 game Aztec Challenge for the



Atari 2600. The game, entitled A-VCS-tec Challenge, is due out soon as part of a limited production run, and you'll be able to order your copy from **www.quernhorst.de/atari/ac.html**. From the previews we've seen it certainly looks promising, and we'll hopefully review it in *Retro Gamer* once it's finished.

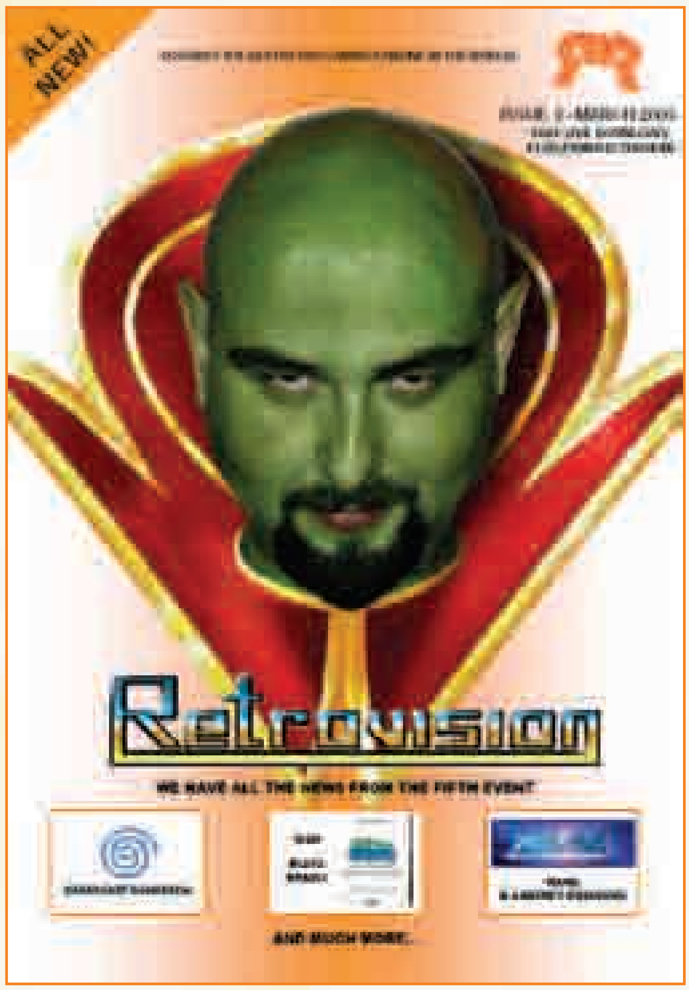
Last ZXF... for a while

Sad news for all Spectrum fans. Issue 10 of Colin Woodcock's excellent fanzine *ZXF* will be the last for a while. We believe that other commitments have forced Colin's decision here, and would like to wish him well and thank him for his hard work in producing what is undoubtedly one of the finest fanzines currently available. You can download every issue from **www.cwoodcock.co.uk/zxf**, where you'll also find contact details for Colin himself.

In other news, Allan Bairstow's *Commodore Scene* will be taking a break for 2005, again due to other commitments. Allan is to produce a small newsletter for any Commodore fans who signs up, and insists that there will be a CS 2006. You can find out more information at **www.commodore scene.org.uk**.

Retro revived

After two months of hard slog, the third issue of *Retro Revival* fanzine is available for download from **www.retrorevival.co.uk**. Issue 3 is the biggest issue to date, with 51 pages and the introduction of several regular columns. Highlights include a Retrovision 5 report and a feature on the Dreamcast homebrew scene. Editor Simon is also considering the possibility of distributing future issues on CD-ROM. Sounds interesting.



The latest issue of *Retro Revival* is available now

Retrovision Report

Retrovision returned in February and *Retro Gamer* was all over it like that bad case of mumps that's going around

"The play's the thing" said Hamlet. But he was mad. And fictional. "We came to play" prefers Retrovision.

For those of you who aren't in the know, Retrovision has become Britain's premier retro game-playing event. Its mixture of informal atmosphere, wide range of games and consoles, and a get-your-dirty-hands-directly-on-the-kit attitude have all helped it expand to bursting point. Being held in pubs has probably helped too.

First thought up, then set up, in an Oxfordshire pub basement by Mark Rayson back in 2001 to put his ever-growing collection of retro gear to good use, each event has been bigger and more successful than the last. This time, tickets sold out completely. In a change to previous events, Mark has taken a purely organisational stance. He left the supply, running and provision of equipment and games down to a number of other participants, including Console Passion, UKRockers, PsychoRob's Game Zone and RetroPassion. He promised us the biggest event so far, and it turned out to be exactly that. So, it's clearly come a long way since it began, though not literally as it's a mere 75 Earth miles to the current venue in the George Hotel, Frome.

Although originally planned as a four-day event, it was inevitable that with the weekend and the planned concert, Saturday was going to be the busiest day. Indeed, both Friday and Sunday were laidback days, and Monday was so relaxed it didn't even bother to turn up – it was cancelled because both RetroPassion and Console Passion had to leave on the Sunday evening. But there was plenty to fit in to three days – you do leave Retrovision needing a break to recover.

Friday 11th

Arriving early on Friday meant there was a chance to try out most of the setup before the hordes descended, and to meet and greet friends from far and wide. Since the last Retrovision things have expanded, and presentation has become more professional. The additional gaming areas meant that it was out with the Scalextric and LAN network, and in with projectors and large-screen TVs.

With the room split across two levels, the main gaming area was downstairs. An Xbox and GameCube were aligned to a massive projector that was generally used for playing Pro Evo 4 and various emulators throughout the weekend. Around it sat a fair amount of Atari tech provided by the folks at MyAtari, which was used either to produce music during the course of the event or entertain passers-by. There were also two stand-up MAME machines that could be freely used, and a cocktail variant



Retrovision organiser Mark Rayson and wife Sarah



Fancy one of these in your front room? This MAME cocktail cabinet was raffled off by Digital Arcade

provided by Digital Arcade that would later be raffled off.

Across the floor was a fantastic two-screen OutRun 2 setup that seemed to be constantly in use (by the end of the weekend everyone had been thoroughly soaked by the Magical Sound Shower). Alongside that was a Vectrex, a PlayStation, an Xbox (which generally saw Geometry Wars play!) and several retro consoles.

Upstairs: PsychoRob had a wealth of consoles connected to another projector; Console Passion was running a bookcase of games for sale and a slew of consoles to play; and UKRockers provided another linked OutRun 2 experience together with a Dreamcast and PlayStation 2. Tempest 2000 and Street Fighter II Collection were also getting plenty of play and the large projector on the ground floor frequently burst forth with beams of radiance from the Atari version of Colourspace, with the occasional delve into Gigawing and Super Pipeline. It was, to say the least, chock full of tech and next time they're probably gonna need a bigger venue.

Come 7pm the first of the raffles started, though it quickly turned into mass hysteria when it appeared a lot of the tickets had been purchased by just two people. Mark found that he was almost unable to give away copies of Blitz Basic to an audience in which everyone who could use it already had it. The whole thing descended into lunacy within about two minutes.

Things eventually wound up after midnight and some people trudged off to bed, while others invaded the local nightclub to continue partying.



Jeff Minter and friend Giles enjoying two-player OutRun 2

Saturday 12th

Retrovision is an event at which old and new games stand side by side, and recent favourites Mashed and Donkey Konga were strongly in evidence throughout the day. Their relative simplicity and pick-up-and-playability endeared them to many attendees. That and the fact we all like shooting people in retaliation for being knocked out, and deliberately trying to activate the clap sensor on other peoples' bongo drums.

Competitions were also held on a variety of games. These included: Sensible World of Soccer (Amiga), Gridrunner (VIC-20), Video Olympics (Atari 2600, run by the GameBase64 team), OutRun 2 (Xbox) and Galaxian (MAME). Aside from the OutRun 2 challenge, the rest were won by clear margins, with Ely retaining his SWOS title, and Mat Allen taking the Gridrunner and Galaxian titles. Cups were handed out in ritual fashion to the winners, just before the more successful draw for the cocktail MAME cabinet took place. Although tickets were £5 each, it attracted a lot of attention and desire. Needless to say, a similar draw next time would prove equally popular. Hint, hint.

Following the concert that evening, and just when we thought the surprises were over, Jeff Minter stepped up with a 20-minute DVD featuring footage of his new post-Unity project. It looks like VLM but this is way ahead of anything seen publicly before. This is something... more than that. But Jeff wasn't answering questions so we'll have to wait and see precisely what it's all about.

Sunday 13th

Sunday, as it turned out, ended up much like Friday. Things took on a laidback nature, with friendly banter and random games of anything springing up. A Katamari Damacy competition was organised at short notice (quickest time to finish Make A Star 3 level) and there were about 15 competitors. In the end, Mat Allen took that title as well. It's a pity that it won't get a European release as it truly was one of the games of last year.

By Monday everyone was spent, so it was left to the hardcore to say the goodbyes and see everyone head for home early.

How did it go? Retrovision continues to provide the excellent atmosphere of a free play arcade, crossed with a ridiculously well-equipped mate's games room. And it just keeps getting bigger and better. Organiser Mark Rayson was certainly upbeat. Speaking to him after the show he described it as: "The most amazing weekend, it blew my mind." Fairly positive, then. He'll be organising another event shortly, with more changes planned to the format and the possibility of expanding the successful musical element. A name change to Retrovision Fusion is also on the cards. "It just kept getting better," he says, and we won't argue with that.

To find out about the next Retrovision event, visit ***www.retrovision.org.uk.*** *Thanks to Mat Allen, Andrew Fisher and Andy Krouwel for this report.*

›Listen to the band

Saturday evening's concert was hosted in pseudo-impromptu fashion by Ben Daglish. Its content was a number of well-known Stuck in D'Eighties tracks that were given a new acoustic angle more suited to the intimate setting. Mark 'Madfiddler' Knight was on his violin, Jon Hare was on the guitar and Chris Abbot was on percussion, while Ben was all over the place, constantly switching instruments in an entertaining version of pass the parcel. Despite the lack of practise time, it still sounded absolutely fantastic and everyone present was either nodding or humming along, whilst watching the game footage and animations from the projector. Ben commented at one point that we were all geeks, that our heads were all at 30 degrees to the stage watching the screen and that the band could have been four topless girls and we'd still have watched the games. At least ,we think it was Ben. We weren't watching at the time.

The set itself lasted about an hour and included Auf Wiedersehen Monty, Paperboy, Deflektor, Way of the Exploding Fist and finished off with the crowd-pleasing Rasputin. Just when everyone was thinking that would be it for the night, the band decided to come back out and just jam along to whatever music happened to be playing. In some ways, this was actually more impressive than the concert had been. In the middle of it all, there was another scattered Magical Sound Shower, along with Oxygene 4 and Monty on the Run, a staple of their performances.



The band from left to right: Mark 'Madfiddler' Knight, Jon Hare, Chris Abbot and Ben Daglish

Music by Design

A good soundtrack can make or break a film, and the soundtrack album has always been a big seller. The same now applies to games, particularly Japanese titles, and to the remix scene. Neil Carr set up Music by Design, his own remix record label, in 2003. Andrew Fisher catches up with Neil to ask him about remixes, being a record producer, Atari ST music and his new album



Neil Carr, pictured here with one of his creations

Back in 1999, Neil teamed up with fellow musician/ remixer Markus Klein (LMan) to launch **www.remix64.com**. This site has now become the best place to discuss C64 remixes, to preview new tracks and to find critical feedback on new projects. For beginners there are some useful tips, for experienced users there are links to valuable resources, and for everyone else there are the Remix64 and Amiga Remix charts, enabling you to find out what's hot and what's not.

From the website came the idea to produce an album of remixes, and there have since been two Remix64 albums. Volume 1, released in 2002 by C64Audio, imagines how the synth bands and composers of the 1980s would have tackled a C64 remix. There are tunes in the style of Paul Hardcastle, Vangelis and Depeche Mode among others, and all the tracks sound very impressive. Volume 2, which came out in December 2003 and is subtitled Into Eternity, is a deep listening experience. Emotional, orchestral and soaring tunes from the talented remixers draw you in, and the whole album is tied together by the story in the CD inlay. Sadly, there are no plans for a third album in the series.

Since the release of Remix64 volume 2 Neil has signed licensing deals for Japanese soundtrack and remix CDs, including albums from respected computer musicians such as Bjorn Lynne, Chris Huelsbeck and Jim Cuomo.

"We set up Music by Design solely to distribute Remix64 volume 2," said Neil. "Upon starting development of the website it soon became apparent that with a little effort we could actually help bring retro, scene and videogame music to the public. After a quick evaluation during development of volume 2 we started to think we could do more than just distribute one CD. I wanted everyone to experience what I had been experiencing for some time. So, Music by Design became a record label and a music store. It was our way of supporting a much-misunderstood genre of music and an effort to bring it out to the public.





The original Remix64 collection was published by Chris Abbot's C64Audio, while the second volume was released on the Music by Design label

›Demo art



Another interesting product in the current Music by Design catalogue is *Demoscene: The Art of Real-Time*. This art book by Evenlake Studios follows the development of the computer demo, from the crackers of the 1980s to the demo parties of the 1990s. It's packed with screenshots and fascinating discussions on the history of the scene.

›Machinae Supremacy



Retro bands, playing old tunes on live instruments, are a rare breed. Machinae Supremacy are from Sweden and take it to the next level with their first album, Deus Ex Machinae. Inspired by game soundtracks and aggressive guitar bands, the album has deep philosophical lyrics and big guitar riffs. Every track is punctuated by retro sounds.

The band have recently completed the soundtrack for a PC game called Jets 'n' Guns, a 2D horizontal shoot-em-up (you'll find a demo of the game on this month's coverdisc). UK fans got to see them in 2002 at the third Back in Time Live event. Now Neil Carr is hoping to bring them back to the UK for a gig in 2005.

"We are now in our second year and we have increased our range from a single CD to over 50 products. We are always looking to increase our range of CDs, be that in-house productions or brought-in productions. We are very busy developing many CDs at the moment in-house and outside.

"Running Music by Design has taken up more time than I could have possibly expected. It's now become a full-time job. The day-to-day running is always a challenge, as you never know what to expect from one day to the next. We could be negotiating deals with a band, making licensing agreements with videogame companies, investing time in new ideas for the website, or producing our latest in-house product.

"Music by Design has come a long way in its first year – we've actually surpassed our own expectations. In the future we wish to produce more products, double our catalogue and continue our work developing the website magazine section that we launched recently. Our aim is to make Music by Design an experience rather than just a Web store."

Revival ST

A new album, called Revival ST, is currently being put together. It's an Atari ST remix album and is a project that is close to Neil's heart.

"I was heavily involved in the ST demo scene when I was in my youth. As even the most die-hard fan will recognise the Atari ST had an inferior sound chip to other computers around. The interesting thing is that some of the melodies constructed by the musicians at this time were staggering despite the weakness of the YM chip. The YM chip had square sound – to most non-dedicated ears it sounded pretty awful – yet hidden in there were some extraordinary melodies. The idea behind the Atari ST album was to bring out the greatness of these melodies in a modern studio reconstructed atmosphere. Basically, what these tunes could have sounded like on today's technology.

"We have a team of over 20 people working on the CD, with many musicians working on game scores for modern videogames, while other musicians have earned high acclaim for their remixing work. The album is due to be released in March/April 2005. What we have done is taken on board the criticism and praise from both Remix64 volumes 1 and 2, and we are confident that Revival ST will be our best remix album yet."

So, with more new products to promote and produce, and with the promise of more music from remixers including Glyn R Brown and acts like Machinae Supremacy, Music By Design is building itself a big audience

›Top ST tunes

We asked Neil to pick his favourite ST tunes, and here's the five he came up with…

Children

Jochen Hippel
Actually, this isn't a Hippel tune, it's a cover of Jeroen Tel's piece on the C64. It's just a simple collection of children's songs with a dance beat behind it. I always thought the ST remake by Hippel sounded better than the C64 version.

Fairlight

The Bard
This is very interesting, as it was probably the first ever remix (not remake) of a C64 tune. There was an audio utility on the ST called Quartet, and a friend of mine who is a classically trained pianist totally remixed the theme tune to Fairlight using Quartet's unique digital sound.

Chambers of Shaolin

Jochen Hippel
This was the first tune I heard on an ST game that made me think the sound chip wasn't so bad after all. It's a large soundtrack fitting into the oriental style, and always reminds me of The Last Ninja.

Goldrunner

Rob Hubbard
This was the first ST game that I ever saw, at a friend's house before I actually owned an ST. I was so impressed I bought an ST soon after. It's also a cover of a C64 tune (Human Race sub-tune 4).

Tetra Quest

Paul Shields
For the life of me I can't remember the game but the music is staggering. A high energy piece that is one of the few tunes to do credit to the YM chip without using any trickery like samples. It's pure YM and better for it. We hope to have this on our Revival CD.

›Web resources

www.remix64.com
The starting place for anyone interested in remixing C64 and Amiga music.

www.c64audio.com
Another source of C64 and Amiga remix CDs.

www.mbdrecords.com
Browse the online catalogue of CDs and read features/reviews and interviews with key people.

www.machinaesupremacy.com
The official site, with lots of tracks to download.

1UP HIGH SCORE

THE STORIES BEHIND THE SCORES



American Mark Robichek can proudly call himself the world's best Frogger player. After all, his high score of 442,330 has never been beaten, despite being recorded over 20 years ago

Nowadays, playing games is usually something that's done at home in private, so it's easy to forget that in the heyday of the arcade, showboating your skills was a very public affair. Mark Robichek puts his monumental achievement in its historical context.

"Let me start out by telling you what brought me to Phil's Family Fun Centre in the first place. You see, I had never played there before, as this Southern California location was nearly eight hours (by car) from my home in Northern California. It turns out that a battle had developed between California and North Carolina, as a huge number of videogame world record holders lived in those two states. The gauntlet was thrown down, and the two states agreed to challenge each other to see which could win the most games. I believe there were 20 games involved in all. If any records happened to be set during that long weekend, all the better, as Twin Galaxies (in Ottumwa, Iowa) was keeping a close eye on the competition. Before that weekend, I spent hours practising Frogger at my local arcade.

"The two host arcades made sure that the settings were identical on the machines in each state. Before that clash, the Frogger world record was only in the 200,000 range. On the first day of the competition, I posted a new world record of around 280,000. On Saturday, my worthy opponent broke 300,000 for the first time. Finally, on the last day, 30 August 1982, I managed to pull off that renowned 442,330. I was so focused on the game that I really didn't notice who was watching me. However, I know that there were a combination of friends, fans and arcade workers watching, and the crowd was growing as it became clear that my game was turning into something special."

That astounding game took Mark exactly two hours and 59 minutes, and saw him clock an amazing 300,000 with his first frog, which almost beat the just-set world record. Unfortunately, the nature of Frogger means that things can change quickly...

"Disaster struck! I lost four frogs in less than four minutes, as the game had changed speeds into an impossible setting. You see, the game doesn't really have levels. Every time you finish a round of getting 5 frogs home, the cars and logs change in speed and quantity, seemingly at random. Sometimes it would change to a timing that just would not allow the player to get a frog into the leftmost home. Fortunately, the speed changed again before all six of my frogs disappeared, and I managed to push my score up to 442,330 with those last two frogs."



Mark Robichek, holder of the officially-recognised Frogger world record

Lucky break

Mark acknowledges that there was therefore an element of good fortune involved in his record-breaking win that day, but that should not undermine the hours he put in beforehand and the strategies he'd developed. A key technique was putting the first frog of each round into the leftmost home. Mark explains that he did this because regardless of the patterns of logs and crocodiles in the water, the remaining positions were





Frogger's hop 'n' dodge gameplay is timeless, with versions (official or otherwise) still appearing on consoles and computers

FROGGER™

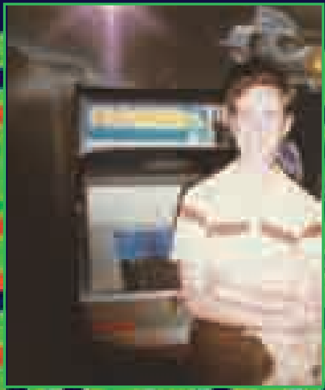
›Family Tree

Frogger was developed by Konami and distributed by Sega in 1981. The game was an immediate success in the arcades, but the real impact was felt at home where Parker Brother released versions for all of the popular platforms. A home sequel, Frogger II: Threeedeep, appeared in 1984, but it wasn't until 1991 that an arcade sequel appeared. Entitled Ribbit and again released by Sega, the follow-up was a two-player co-operative game with updated graphics. Since then, Frogger updates (including Frogger Beyond and the recent Frogger's Adventures) have appeared on computers and consoles, and now our froggy friend is leaping onto the PlayStation Portable and Nintendo DS handhelds.





Ribbit appeared in 1991, a decade after the release of the original



Well over 20 years on and challengers still haven't managed to wipe that smile off Mark's face

always possible to reach. Other than that his winning formula was primarily based on the ability to keep a cool head.

"If the pattern and speed of the cars wasn't to my liking, I would return to the start to compose myself. I usually got the lady frog, but if getting her meant risking death or losing too much time, I didn't bother. One thing you may find amusing is that occasionally the lady frog would become invisible. The only way you could tell that you had encountered her was that your feet would turn purple, and the lady frog sound effect would play. At my videogame-playing peak, I got so in tune with the game, that I'd always know where to find her, even if she wasn't visible."

And at his peak, Mark was certainly a force to be reckoned with. He still holds the world record for Moon Patrol (1,214,600) and is in the all-time top 10 of high scores for Pengo, Bagman and Bezerk. His status has resulted in a little fan worship from a new generation and also the inevitable challengers to his crown, and he accepts both with admirable modesty.

"Frankly, I'm really quite shocked that no one has managed to beat this score of mine! I know that people have been trying, and I even had a younger player (Pat Laffaye) approach me at last year's Funspot tournament to proclaim that he WAS GOING TO BEAT MY FROGGER SCORE! Well, he did break 400,000 (for his second time, I believe), but my 442,330 still reigns supreme. With his determination and youthful exuberance, Pat will probably beat my score eventually, but I kinda hope not. My videogame skills are no longer in peak form, and there is absolutely no way that I'd be able to compete with Pat (or other up-and-comers) if they beat one of my records today."

Celebrity worship

Funspot (**www.funspotnh.com**) is a huge arcade in Weirs Beach, New Hampshire, featuring an entire floor of arcade games from the olden days. For six years now, they have hosted an annual Classic Video and Pinball Tournament. Mark attended for the first time in June 2004, primarily as a celebrity guest. "Even though I'm no longer a threat to the record books, I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet people, sign some autographs and play some of the classic arcade games that I hadn't seen for nearly two decades, like Crazy Climber, one of my all-time favourite games."

Mark's love of arcade games led to a career in and around the gaming industry, including the position of President of Actual Entertainment, a small game developer that produced Gubble and Gubble 2. The games have been described as "like Pac-Man in 3D," fitting considering classic games are so much a part of Mark's history.

"I believe games like Frogger appeal to all ages and genders. While shoot-em-up, fighting and driving games may appeal more to the younger male crowd, there will always be people who want something different, something simple, something that's just pure fun."



Classic Game Tournaments take place every year at the Funspot arcade, but no one has managed to top Mark's Frogger score… yet

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Welcome to another eclectic gathering of retro-gaming goodness, including the rarest of the rare and the most expensive ZX81 game to date

Spotted by reader Leigh Hills in last month's *Retro Gamer* and most definitely worthy of a mention is possibly the rarest gaming machine ever.

The Atari Cosmos was going to be the world's first holographic tabletop game. The games weren't actually holograms but standard red LEDs moving behind a translucent green holographic foreground. At certain specific moments during a game, the hologram would alter to indicate a change in the gameplay.

The machine, in prototype form, made its debut at the 1981 New York Toy Fair where it was generally well received, although critics argued that the holography involved was more of a gimmick than an actual gaming innovation. With this criticism ringing in its ears, Atari decided to redesign the Cosmos. But executives were sweating over the viability of the machine, so the project was suddenly halted short of its full production run. The project was shelved and the majority of equipment and components were binned. To date, only five Atari Cosmos machines are known to exist. Three are just the empty plastic casings whilst the other two still contain the original electronic components. The example currently on auction is one of the empty shell prototypes.



Only five in the world, but will anyone stump up the £10,000 required to own this piece of gaming history?



'Rare' (or should that be 'RARE!!') is a word that is bandied around on eBay like it's going out of fashion. However, the Cosmos is closer to extinct than rare, and the price tag set by the Canadian seller reflects this all too well. To own one of the five known prototypes you are currently going to have to pay £9,990. At the time of writing, over 20,000 people had viewed the auction on eBay UK. It will be interesting to see if there are any actual takers.

Virtual dream

Sticking with the 3D gaming theme, let's take a look at one of Nintendo's lesser-known consoles, the Virtual Boy.

The Virtual Boy consisted of a console and a headset that immersed you in the 3D games you were playing (at least that was the idea). The headset contained two small separate screens giving you the 3D effect, and this worked very well. Not at all bad considering all Virtual Boy games ran in just two colours, red and black.

Unfortunately, there were a couple of major problems with the Virtual Boy. Firstly, the machine reportedly gave users a headache after prolonged play, and secondly, Nintendo didn't actively promote the system once it was released. With the impending introduction of the N64 console, Nintendo concentrated all its efforts on promoting that machine and the Virtual Boy became the forgotten sibling of the family. It was released and discontinued within a year of its introduction. Once the machine had ceased production and games purchases had all but dried up, the few games that were released were limited to short production runs. That sounds like ideal conditions for a collectible spawning ground.



That's a strike alright – £2,000 for a rare Virtual Boy title

So, it comes as no surprise that some of the later Virtual Boy releases are considered to be ultra rare. One such title, Virtual Bowling produced by Athena in 1995, popped up on eBay France recently. A mint-condition, cellophane-wrapped edition of the game was snapped up by a Japanese buyer for the immensely impressive Buy-It-Now price of £2,000. Hope the buyer has stocked up on paracetamol…

›Spotlight



A ZX81 game has recently raised the price bar for the well-loved system. The title in question is a ZX81 compilation release by CRL, Ten 1K Games. CRL titles aren't usually known for high prices, but when two avid collectors set about each other with a rabid bidding finger and a steely look in their eyes you could see the title was going to fetch more than a couple of quid. With just a few minutes to go a frenzied bidding war pushed the final price up to an amazing £80.89. We've seen ZX80 titles raise prices like this but a ZX81 game? The last few months have seen ZX81 titles becoming more and more popular with prices creeping steadily northward and may very well be something to keep an eye on in the future.

The unlucky losing bidder was later victorious in another auction however. A Spectrum adventure game called HRH by the small Liverpool-based company 8th Day Software, caught the interest of several individuals. And with good reason, because 8th Day titles are notoriously hard to find, hence lucky winning bidder Paul Hurd paying a right royal £53.90 for it.

eMag

The Retro Forum

Have your say... Send us your letters or head over to the forum and shout it out!



Vintage news

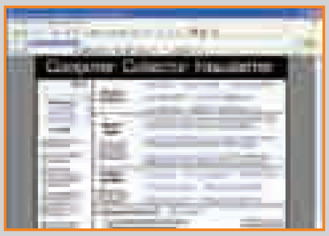
Hello from New Jersey, USA. I'm the editor of *Computer Collector Newsletter* and recently learned of *Retro Gamer*. It looks good and it's exciting to see the magazine sold in local Barnes & Noble stores.

About my newsletter: it was founded just over a year ago by Michael Nadeau, who is a former editor of *Byte* magazine. Mike is basically hands-off, and I edit, publish and write most of the issues. By day I'm a freelance technology reporter. I also get some help from Christine Finn, archaeologist and author of the book *Artifacts*; Sellam Ismail, owner of the Vintage Computer Festival; Erik Klein, who runs the site **www.vintage-computer.com**; and Bill Loguidice, editor of **www.armchairarcade.com**

The newsletter is free, publishes every Monday(-ish) via email, and currently has about 670 subscribers. The website (**http://news.computercollector.com**) is purely to support the email publication and its design is intentionally primitive.

Anyway, I will continue to read your magazine, and I hope you and your readers will check out my newsletter. The vintage computing hobby isn't as large as the vintage gaming hobby, but it's growing all the time.

Evan Koblentz, via email

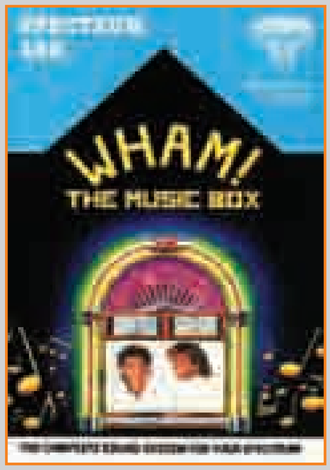


RG: Thanks for your letter Evan. We had a look at your website and have already subscribed to your newsletter. We're always on the lookout for more community members wanting to support the retro scene, both for games and classic hardware. We'd recommend a visit to the website to anyone who's looking for some in-depth information of vintage systems and their availability, along with some general news, product reviews and articles. We're glad you like *RG*, it's always good to hear from fans across the pond.

Retro musicians

Recently a film has been released about Robert Moog, the primary force behind Moog Synthesizers, and this set me thinking about an idea for an article that the staff or readers of *Retro Gamer* might be interested in putting together in the future.

The feature would be about music makers for retro hardware – the software and gizmos that various companies have tried to put on the market to bring out the Bach in all of us. There were questionable objects like that naff



http://from.the.web.forum

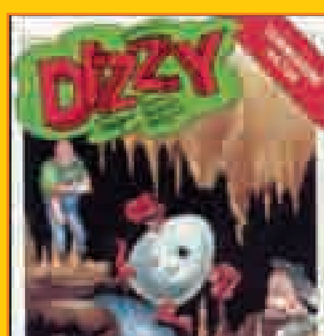
Last month we asked forum visitors what their dream TV console would be and the games they'd like to see running on it. Here are some of your suggestions...

ID: >Garryg<

How about a plugs-into-the-TV thingy for adventure games. No honest, it isn't that stupid an idea. There is a massive text-based adventure games community still thriving through the Net and some very good 'retro' adventure games out there. Perhaps this could be a simple box that you plug a USB keyboard into, or a keyboard with the required circuitry built-in. This shouldn't be very expensive or difficult to do. I would like to see a best of Level 9, Infocom and Scott Adams adventures etc.

ID: >Enzo<

I know I've mentioned this on the forum before but... what about a Codemasters 'early years'

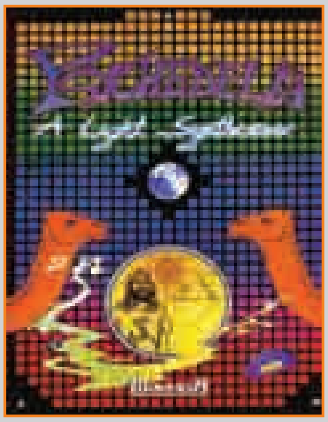


machine. It won't allow its own stuff to be emulated, so why not make a bit of money out of the old games. Let's put all the Simulators on there, plus all the adventures that it was famous for... Dizzy, Seymour, etc.

ID: >Spinal<

I would like to see a genuine NES one. There are about 100 rip-off

feux-piano overlay thingy that Commodore released, which fitted over the old original style CBM64 casing, and the Music Studio from Rainbird that played awful squeeky-boink renditions of "You are My Sunshine" on various 8-bit platforms. Now admit it, we all tried them, gave up and went back to playing Double Dragon or some other more useful waste of our childhood.
George Johnson, via email



RG: That's not a bad idea because it's an area of retro computing that many people will remember. We certainly recall the appearance of odd gadgets that attempted to infuse the home computer market with extra 'content', many of which died a death very quickly. Who could forget Wham! Music Box on the good old Spectrum?

Lost listings

I'm hoping that one of your many readers can help me with my problem. I'm a big Spectrum fan and I have been unlucky in my search for a specific programming listing. I'm almost certain that the listing in question was in *Your Spectrum* (or *Your Sinclair*), maybe even *Crash*. The program, when finished, turned your Speccy into disco lights. All you did was play music on your tape deck with the lead in the mic socket. The affect was really cool, and I'd like to reproduce it. If only I could find that listing. Please help.
Tony Steeden, via email

RG: That sounds very much like Jeff Minter's Psychedelia, which we believe was originally published as a type-in magazine listing before being updated and released as a full-price title. You'll find it on our issue 12 coverdisc. If that's not the one then maybe one of our readers can help.

Readers' collections

I am a collector from the United States and I have to say that I love your magazine. Everything is always well written and accurate.

Here in the States, we have a rather poor magazine called *Tips and Tricks*. Despite being inaccurate and biased, it does have a section called 'Collector's Corner' in which it mentions a couple of items that casual gamers probably don't know about. In it, it has something called 'Room of Doom' in which it showcases a reader's videogame collection. I don't know about you, but I think a similar showcase of a reader's collection would be a rather nice addition to your magazine. It would let us all compare and contrast one person's hard work with our own. And it would give us ideas about what we want to pursue for our own collections and inspire us so that we don't feel bad about spending all our money on videogames.
John Leckert, via email

RG: We always like to hear about our readers' retro collections as it not only lets people see what others have got, but it also shows just how popular the retro scene is and how collectable old games and systems have become. Who knows, we may look into this in the future. We might even see the same collectors on *Antiques Roadshow* one day!

VideoPac

Just to say what a great magazine! I read it from cover to cover every month. I was wondering if you have any plans to do a feature on the Philips G7000? The machine has quite a following, especially in Europe. This is what started me off before the ZX81/Spectrum.
Rob, via email

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RG: We do indeed remember the Phillips VideoPac G7000, which arrived in 1978. Surprisingly though, we haven't received any letters from readers showing an interest in the console's inclusion in the magazine – until now. So, if anyone else would like us to include this cult system in *Retro Gamer*, please drop us a line.



NES emulators stuck inside N64 style controllers, but Nintendo still hasn't released one. I'm sure all the bits would fit inside a proper NES controller too, even the 2xAA batteries.

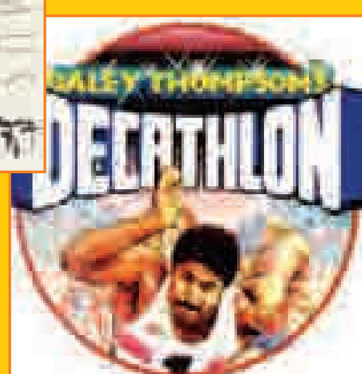
ID: >Turrican<

How about a little box with a mouse coming from it, and inside the box there's every LucasArts point-and-click adventure from years ago, such as Maniac Mansion, Monkey Island, Full Throttle, etc. You could do the same with Revolution software. A Thalamus joystick would be great too, with games like Summer Camp, Winter Camp, Delta, Armalyte, Creatures, Creatures II and Snare.



ID: >Paul J<

What could be quite different is a Track & Field type console. Two buttons on the left for running, one on the right for jumping etc. It could have Track & Field, Daley Thompson's Decathlon, Hyper Sports (The MSX also had Hyper Sports II and III) and Combat School to name a few. Plus it would make you fit hitting all those buttons all the time! Just make sure it's button based like the original Track & Field arcade machine not a joystick, as we all know how many Quickshots those sorts of games killed back then.



ID: >King Monkey<

I would like to see something along the lines of a TV system reproducing a whole series of games from multiple systems. Resident Evil TV, with the whole series on one joypad would be one. There could also be a version for the likes of Tomb Raider and maybe even a racing version with the WipEout series. Obviously it would need a save

The good old days

Remember the good old days when the arcade thrived and pockets full of 10 pence coins only had one use? In those days, it was all about mastering a game and putting in a good enough performance to enter your name on the high-score table, hoping it would remain immortal as due payment for all the time and money invested. Unfortunately, unless you were truly expert at a particular game it would only be a matter of time before your momentous achievement was usurped, or the insensitive arcade owner decided the machine had to be powered off and on again. Did you notice how these disciples of the devil never actually powered the cabs while anyone was around? Too chicken I reckon! These were great times that made English seaside holidays bearable – they were a worthy escape from the mundane reality of pebble beaches, fish and chips and endless rainy days.

I used to ponder how great it would be to have one or more of my favourite arcade cabinets at home. However, apart from being prohibitively expensive, they were also huge, heavy and totally impractical, as well as a complete non-starter with the parents. And so my interest in home videogaming commenced and the closer the game was to its arcade counterpart, the better. I dabbled in the home Pong derivatives before acquiring a Prinztronic console with Invaders (wow!), but it was a nightmare with those dreadful analog joysticks. I then moved onto the Atari VCS (real Space Invaders at last) and through the early 80s micro revolution (usually Commodore). The quest to play all those awesome arcade games in the comfort of your own bedroom was just too enticing to resist.



The Atari VCS was a magical piece of electrickery and I fondly recall queuing for ages in my nearest Woolworths to get a quick blast on Space Invaders when it was first released. There were no gaming pods in those days, so the machine was just perched on a stack of Ingersol console boxes without a security person to be seen for miles. Anyone could take the machine, controllers or cartridge and just walk off with them into the sunset, but they knew it was a risky proposition with the line of queuing kids likely to string them up on the bandstand by their genitals if attempted. I doubt they would have even made it to the door, and let's face it, people just didn't even think about doing such crooked things back then!

The home arcade clones were a joy to play, with a little imagination filling in the necessary technical deficiencies, but they were always a step behind their bigger brothers. Continual visits to the arcade were mandatory in order to keep abreast of new developments, hoping that one day the home experience would be on an even keel with the arcade. Although my personal preference was for arcade games, it would be naive of me not to give a well-deserved mention to all those totally original games created by the bedroom programmers of the era. My parents still haven't forgiven me for keeping them awake till the early hours playing Hover Bovver at full volume on my portable TV. The Yak got me in trouble more times than I can remember but his masterful creations were the finest blast that pocket money could buy. Period.

Towards the middle of the 80s, I had this preposterous dream that one day we would be playing games where we could literally appear as a character in a film like James Bond and interactively play through the story. Fast forward to the present day, and we are virtually at the point where this unlikely dream has pretty much become a reality.

But am I ecstatic that we have made it? In a word, no. I am now finding the games we play today are graphically stupendous, aurally inspired and technically accomplished but they just do not have any charm. What was once just an unlikely nirvana has turned into a bit of a nightmare as the scripted nature of games today have little or no replay value and, in my opinion, have limited appeal. In fact, the only genre that I find more pleasing today than of times gone by is that of the racing game. Pole Position, Monaco GP *et al.* just cannot match today's wonders, but OutRun still remains a firm favourite. I very much doubt that many games of today will stand the test of time as such classics like Space Invaders, Defender etc, even when they are eventually considered retro. The older arcade games have a certain something that just keeps me coming back. They were, and still are, just so damn playable, addictive, challenging and above all fun. So, even though I expect that I will always keep up with the Jones' by



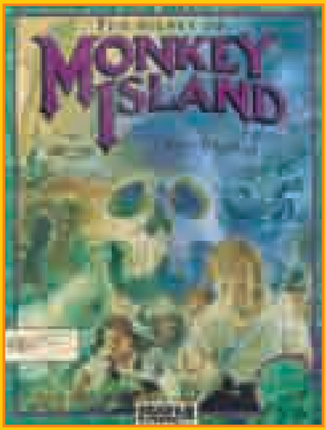
feature and might be slightly more expensive than normal, but the possibilities are endless as gaming becomes more franchise driven.

ID: >Sonic CD<

Well, I would love a SNES handheld, like the Radica Megadrive, and it would include F-Zero, Super Mario World, Mario Kart, Donkey Kong Country and Super Star Wars. It would also be similar to the Radica with a mini console and a SNES joypad. Well, we can live in hope can't we?

ID: >The Analog Kid<

I would love to see the LucasArts point-and-click adventures – the



Monkey Island collection along with Sam and Max, Day Of The Tentacle, The Dig, Full Throttle... and throw in Grim Fandango for good measure.

Star Letter



Want to grab yourself a quality piece of retro-gaming merchandise? Each month we'll select our favourite letter – one that makes us smile or think – and the winner can select one of our retro-themed t-shirts for free...

Atari Destroyer

I thoroughly enjoyed last month's article on the Atari 5200. It brought back so many memories, sadly, not of gaming bliss but of what could have been. Allow me to explain.

I moved to Jamaica with my parents when I was eight years old. My father had brought over a spanking new ZX81 and I did have a dabble on it for a while, but the monochrome display didn't exactly inspire me. Well, not as much as my friends' Atari 2600s. I spent more days at my friends' houses than they did at mine – after all, I don't think I would have gotten anywhere with them by explaining the virtues of poking and peeking. Nah, they wouldn't understand it... heck, I didn't even understand it! While they waggled the night away with their joysticks, I made do with playing Sniper on my membrane keyboard and boy, was I jealous! But that was all about to change.

My dad took pity on me and decided to get me an Atari. Ahhh, my chance to get one up on my friends. I wanted an Atari 5200! After all bigger is better I thought. When it came I was truly in awe – the sleek lines, the silver strip, the controllers with more buttons than I had fingers. I was set to be the envy of my 'Woody' friends. I was in gaming heaven. Well, at least for about three weeks.

Alas, one night as I was playing Tennis, my beloved 5200 suddenly presented me with a screen full of static. The technological marvel had given up the ghost. I tried all manner of button presses/cartridge manipulation. Nothing worked. Sometimes I stared so hard at the static I'm sure I could make out a game screen in there. So there I had it, the latest console sitting beside my TV, about as useful as cold drink in hell. It was like that for about a year. Then, on a trip to America, I bought the 2600 adaptor, on a hope and prayer that it would work – and it did! Beyond all logic my 5200 was up and running, albeit, playing 2600 games, and not before a bit of switch fiddling around the back of the console too. The machine now looked like a Star Destroyer with the adaptor sticking out of it but at least I was gaming again.



So you see, I never got to experience the 'wonderful' 360-degree analog joystick or the 'lifelike' games. But your article has now made up for my missing nostalgia. I still wonder what went wrong with it. It seemed like a great console with many innovative features in its time. Pity I didn't get to fully enjoy it.

David Lee, via email

RG: That's a great story David. The 5200 certainly wasn't cheap, so those three weeks of glorious 'next-gen' gaming came at a fair price. Have a T-shirt on the house to make up for the loss!

playing the latest blockbusters, for me they will never be a substitute for or attain the same respect as the originals of yesteryear.

So the moral of my story is that in my honest opinion, progression and technical advancement do not necessarily generate a more satisfying playing experience. I feel like I have just reached the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow only to find that upon closer inspection it has turned out to be chocolate coins with gold foil wrapping. Thank heavens for the retro revolution as the real nirvana for me is that I can now have thousands of those favourite old arcade cabinets at home courtesy of MAME.

Good to see you guys at CGE UK last year, I'm sure you probably had more than a few people pass on their thanks for a well-overdue and professional retro games publication. Keep up the good work and all the best for the future.

Tony Redpath, via email

RG: It's true that we all love to play games, and here at *Retro Gamer* we play new games as much as anyone else. But it's the classic games that really inspire us, and while old games may not have had real-time bump mapping or polygonal pixel shading flange levers, they still ooze charm and originality. This is something that is rapidly being lost with today's play-it-safe market, which is a shame. New ideas are few and far between, and simply cloning a winning formula is an instant hit with the corporate money men. Ah well, at least we still have our classics.

ID: >deanolufc<

I could name a few, but the one I would like to see would be for the C64. Even then you could have a few different ones. For example, you could have the best platform games, including games like Monty on the Run, Thing on a Spring, Trollie Wallie and Ghosts 'n' Goblins. Or even better, a shoot-em-up collection including games like Delta, Wizball, Zynaps, Paradroid etc. I for one would go out and buy these as they would be great for half an hour in front of the TV

ID: >Neilos626<

I would love Konami to make one that included Gradius, Contra 3, ISS deluxe and a Legend of the Mystical Ninja game, although that last one probably wouldn't be possible due to the need for battery back up.

ID: >Jib1987<

Gunstar Heroes. Just Gunstar Heroes.

ID: >Kaptain_Von<

Having seen console back catalogues raided I would probably go for something slightly different – an Atari ST TV game. My personal choices for the three top games to be included would be:

1) Llamatron: even after 15 years it still retains a huge amount of playability and return value. It starts off slowly and just sucks you in for hours on end.

2) Xenon: this was overshadowed by Xenon 2 but the ability to swap between crafts and the sheer playability makes it a shining example of a shoot-em-up.

3) Pipemania: no compilation is complete without a puzzle game and this one, along with Tetris, was one of my favourites in my ST days. A superb, but almost forgotten gem of a game.



Retro Coverdisc

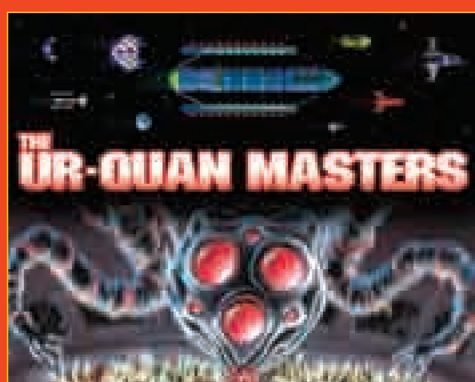
We're particularly proud to include The Ur-Quan Masters on this month's coverdisc. This PC/Mac port of Star Control 2 is a full, unlimited game that offers literally hours of deep, rewarding gameplay. Taking control of a powerful star ship, you can explore over 3,000 planets and make contact with 18 different alien races. There's also a twisting plot to unravel, and the game features full speech and music throughout. It really is one of the finest space exploration games ever made



step 1 Put the coverdisc in your CD/DVD drive and it should start automatically. If not, select Run from the Start menu and enter *D:\browser.exe* (assuming D: is the letter of your CD/DVD drive). When the browser appears, click OK to accept the declaration.



step 2 To install and run The Ur-Quan Masters, first click the Install button. You'll be prompted to specify a folder in which to extract the files. Click the Browse button and choose a location (we recommend you select your Windows Desktop). Click the Unzip button to continue.



step 3 You'll now have to wait for the files to be extracted and copied across. Depending on the speed of you PC this may take up to a minute, so please be patient. When the process is complete, open the folder and double-click uqm.exe to launch The Ur-Quan Masters.



step 4 There are a number of additional PC retro games on the coverdisc and these can be accessed in the usual manner. Some of the games are stored in .zip files, so you might need to use an archive manager like WinZip, which is under the Utilities browser tab.

Problem solving

If you're having a problem with a particular program on our coverdisc, please view the help file in the program for assistance. You might also consider visiting the website of the program author for further help. Otherwise, email **techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk**.

If you are having problems with the CD, first check that it is not dirty or scratched. CDs can be cleaned by holding them under the cold water tap and gently rubbing the silver side with a tissue. Dry it carefully with another tissue.

If the disc still doesn't work, then it may be faulty. Faulty discs should be returned to Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Ltd, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, UK, SK10 4NP. We will replace all genuinely faulty discs.

Coverdisc helpline

01625 855051

techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk

(Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

Helpline for coverdisc problems only

DISCLAIMER

Some of the programs on the Retro Gamer disc interact with your PC on a fundamental level. We strongly advise you back up your personal data before using the disc. Due to the way the Retro Gamer disc is compiled, Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Limited and/or any associated company and/or individual cannot take responsibility for damage to your PC or otherwise arising from use of the coverdisc. You use the programs on the disc at your own risk.

The Ur-Quan Masters

It's a dangerous universe out there, so before you venture boldly forth prepare yourself with our guide to getting your space wings



The story so far

For the past decade, Earth and the rest of the Alliance of Free Stars has fought the Ur-Quan and its mighty Hierarchy of Battle Thralls. During the course of the war, the Earthlings discovered a world once inhabited by the Precursors, an impossibly advanced alien race that disappeared tens of thousands of years ago. This colony – Unzervalt (aka Vela I) – lost all contact with Earth shortly after.

You are Captain Zelnick, a human born on Unzervalt who possesses remarkable knowledge of Precursor technology. You were the one who worked out how to activate a mysterious Precursor installation, discovering that it was in fact a huge facility for building star ships. Unfortunately, Unzervalt is an almost barren world, devoid of useful resources, and there weren't enough materials available to construct an entire vessel, so a large but only partially complete ship was constructed.

Your task is to command this huge craft – the Vindicator – and return to Earth to tell them of the abandoned colony and the advanced technologies you've discovered. But you will soon discover that Earth is a very different planet from the paradise it once was, and the Ur-Quan are now in control of humanity...

Keyboard controls

General game controls

F1	Pause game
F10	Exit game
F12	Emergency exit

Menu controls

Arrow keys	Scroll through selections
Enter	Make selection
Space	Up one level

Space flight controls

Up/Enter	Thrust
Left/Right	Steer
Space	Access main menu

Space combat controls

Up/Enter	Thrust
Left/Right	Steer
Right Shift	Fire primary weapon
Right Ctrl	Fire secondary weapon
Escape	Emergency warp escape

Star map controls

Arrow keys	Move the crosshair
Enter	Select destination
Space	Access main menu
Keypad +	Zoom in
Keypad –	Zoom out

Planet exploration controls

Up/Enter	Thrust
Left/Right	Steer
Right Shift	Fire stun bolt
Escape	Leave planet surface

Conversation controls

Up/Down	Scroll through selections
Left/Right	Rewind/forward
Enter	Make selection
Space	Skip, show/hide summary

Melee controls (player 1)

E	Thrust
S/F	Steer
Q	Fire primary weapon
A	Fire secondary weapon

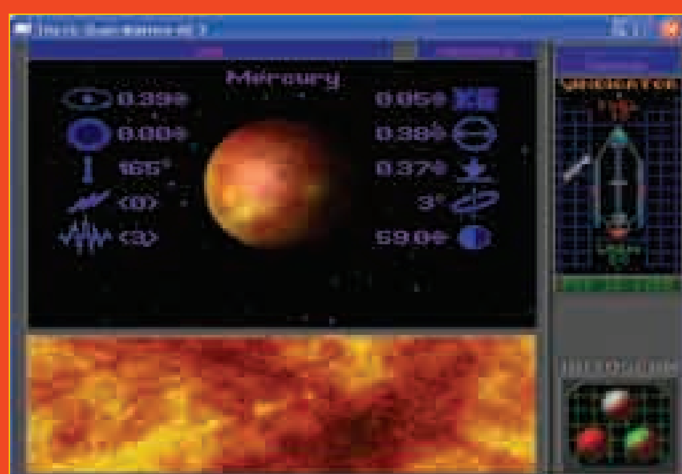
Melee controls (player 2)

Up/Enter	Thrust
Left/Right	Steer
Right Shift	Fire primary weapon
Right Ctrl	Fire secondary weapon

Getting started guide



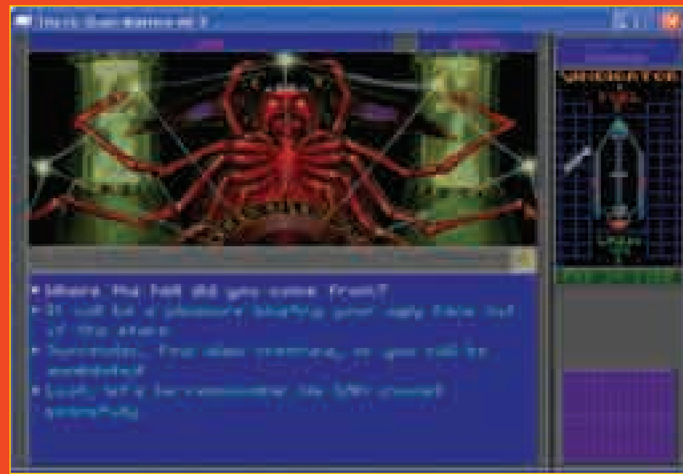
step 1 You begin in the Sol system (that's our solar system in case you didn't know). Your first port of call should be Earth, although it's not as you remembered it. An Ur-Quan probe will give you a warning, but ignore it and proceed to the starbase. After talking to the commander, agree to help and head to Mercury.



step 2 When you reach Mercury, perform a mineral scan to pick up the location of any deposits and then select your lander. Pick a landing spot next to some minerals and head down. Avoiding the flames and quakes, grab as much as the lander can carry and head back to the ship. Repeat until you have plenty of Uranium.



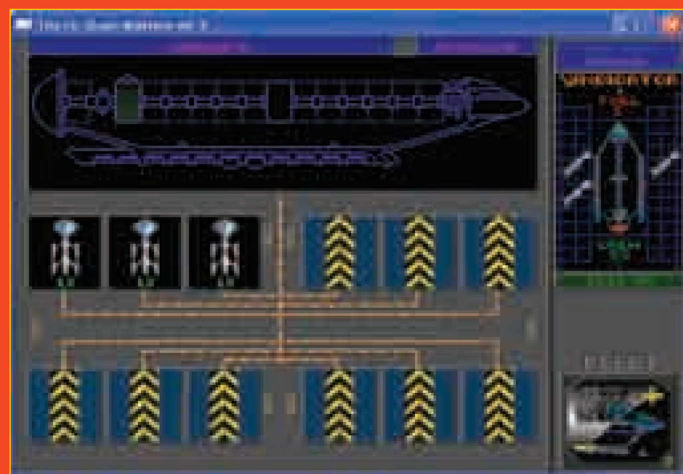
step 3 Head back to the starbase. Offload the radioactive supplies and they'll fix the station. When you ask the commander to join you he'll ask you to eliminate an enemy moon base. So, head to the moon and scan it. Locate the base and use the lander to visit it. It's deserted, so go and inform the starbase commander.



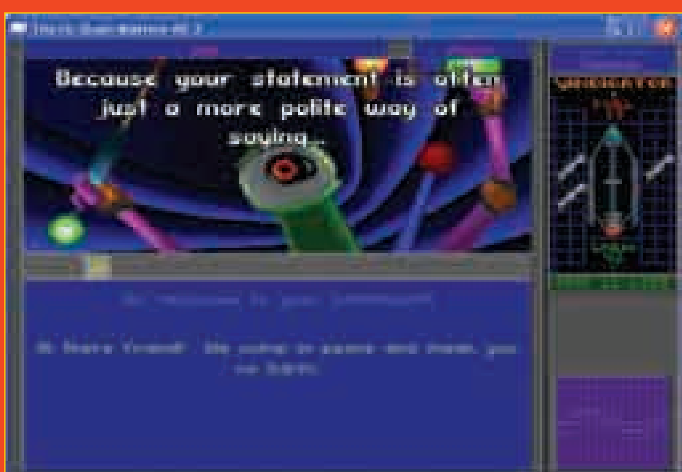
step 4 When you arrive at the base an Ilwrath Avenger will intercept you. You can try talking to it, but it won't do any good. When you inevitably enter battle, select the Earthling Cruiser. Immediately fire off a couple of missiles at the attacker. You'll now have your own starbase to operate from.



step 5 Now that you've got a base of operations you can outfit your flagship. To do this, go to the Outfit Starship menu and install more pods and thrusters. You can also buy more planet landers if you wish. Don't forget to refuel while you're here too. It's a good idea to add another fuel pod and possibly another couple of thrusters.



step 6 You can also build new ships in the starbase. Select the Shipyard option from the menu and the above screen will appear. Here you can re-crew your fleet, including the flagship, and build a new craft if you wish. This costs RUs though, so make sure you spend carefully.



step 7 An important task in your quest is to meet and greet new allies, and you can meet your first on Pluto. Head to Pluto and scan the planet. Locate the biological reading and land there. Now talk to the Spathi captain until he agrees to join your crew (obviously, don't opt to attack him though).



step 8 OK, now you've got your ship outfitted, a starbase to operate from and a new ally, you can set out into the wide black yonder of the galaxy. Head out of the solar system and into hyperspace. From here you can fly to other systems (white specs on the radar) or you can use the galaxy map to set auto pilot.

For more information, refer to the playing manual included on the coverdisc or visit The Ur-Quan Masters homepage at **http://sc2.sourceforge.net**

Retro Mart

Looking for that elusive piece of retro goodness? Got a cupboard full of treasures to sell? Retro Mart is here to help

Atari for sale

Atari 6 Switch Woody Console – Original controller and paddles with three top games. £60. Call Adam on 01430 422954

I program new games – Titles for the Atari VCS 2600. Trade or buy Mental Kombat from www.quernhorst.de/atari

Commodore wanted

Dungeon Master and Captive – For Commodore Amiga 500. Please ring Kenny on 0778 7151731

Sinclair for sale

Spectrum software compilations – The Gold Collection volumes 1 & 2 (twelve games, four cassettes) £15 o.n.o. Phone 07742895287

Sega for sale

Megadrive Official Plug & Play – Six games, including Sonic, Altered Beast, Golden Axe, Flicky, Kid Chameleon and Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine. £20 o.n.o Phone 0117 9144078

Sega Games for Sale – All consoles covered with 100s of titles, all in boxes and complete. Consoles also available, many boxed in good condition. Private collector, moving house. Please call 07814 775463 after 6pm

Maze Hunter 3-D for Master System – UK version, boxed and in pretty good condition. £2.50 plus £1 insured p&p. Email for photo/details – garethcrowley@amiga.e7even.com

Strider for Mega Drive – Japanese version, boxed with instructions, pretty good condition. £6 plus £1 insured p&p. Email for photo/details – garethcrowley@amiga.e7even.com

Sega Saturn – Memory/import and cheat cart. Imports adapter and memory cart all in one. £25 with postage. Paypal welcome. Also, Dreamcast import disc £20 with free postage. Call 01255 677190

Sega wanted

Sega Games – Streets of Rage 3, Super Hang On and GP 96. Must be in good condition. Willing to pay good money. Please call 07814 775468 after 6pm

Looking for a boxed Mega-CD – Preferably with a copy of Sonic CD. Must be in good working order. Call Laurie on 0141 556 3084

Nintendo for sale

11 Nintendo Game and Watches – Various titles from a private collection. All unboxed and excellent condition. £20 each, or the lot for £200. Please call 0772 9593255

Other for sale

NEO-GEO Pocket game Fatal Fury – New game in plastic case. £15 including post. Please email peter@jamesmerry.freeserve.co.uk or telephone 01255 677190

NEO-GEO Pocket game Sonic Adventure – New game in plastic case £15 including post. Other titles also available, please email peter@jamesmerry.freeserve.co.uk

Loved Dizzy? – Then Dizzy: This Is Your Life could be perfect. The 68-page book is just £4.99 with 75p going to the RNIB. Email dizzybook@hotmail.co.uk for more info.

Retro magazines for sale – ACE, Edge, Amstrad Action, The Games Machine etc. Some rare first issues. Open to offers! Call 01915 840437

Alien Crossfire (includes Alpha Centauri) for PC – Old but still good! UK version, boxed with manuals/chart, good condition. £20 + £2 insured p&p. Email for photo/details – garethcrowley@amiga.e7even.com

Retro Gamer issues 1-4 – With discs, condition as new. Will sell issues separately. Offers to rdj@tesco.net or phone 07944 739743

Dragon 32 game – Cruising by Sunshine Software. Unable to test game as I no longer own a Dragon. Offers welcome. Phone 07956622976

Loads of cool 70s and 80s replica merchandise for sale – Funky t-shirts, mouse mats, mugs, and more. email me for list – rob@kapowgifts.com

Images from classic video games! – Please contact Jacqueline Egan. Phone +001 843-412-8893 (US) or visit www.videogamesprites.net

www.binarymemories.co.uk – Retro computer gaming stuff for sale or auction. Come and have a look!

Others wanted

Looking for Retro Gamer magazine – Issues 1 to 8 (with coverdiscs) in good condition. Willing to pay up to £8 per issue. Call Adam on 07731301086

Artists Wanted – We would like to hear from visual artists who have produced work that has been influenced by arcade and computer games. For further information please contact: owen.hurcombe@ staffordshire.gov.uk. Phone: 01785278345

Disk Version of Short Circuit – Developed by Ocean, Amstrad version. Complete copy preferred. Will pay £20 upwards, depending on condition. Call Glen on 0191 5671627

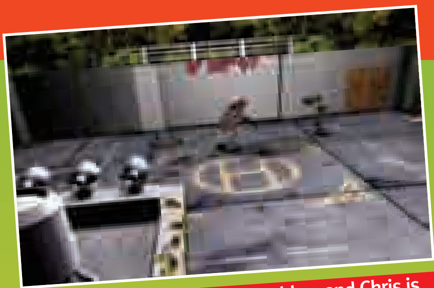
Retro Gaming Clubs

JAMMA+ Forums – For lovers of old retro arcade machines of the 80s and 90s. Come and join us at www.jammaplus.com/forum.

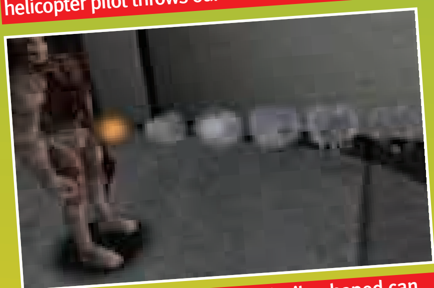
Come and check out MAME cabinet building – Find all things Retro at www.digitalarcade.co.uk. Site forum currently recruiting!

To advertise on this page, fill out the online form at www.retrogamer.net

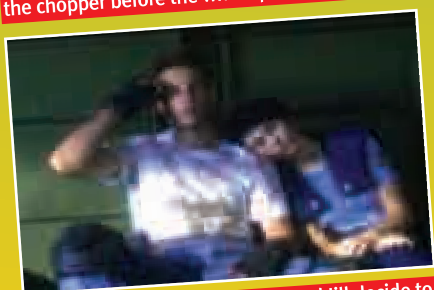
<<<Endgame>>>



The whole mansion is about to blow and Chris is still scrapping with the Tyrant. Luckily, the helicopter pilot throws our hero a rocket launcher



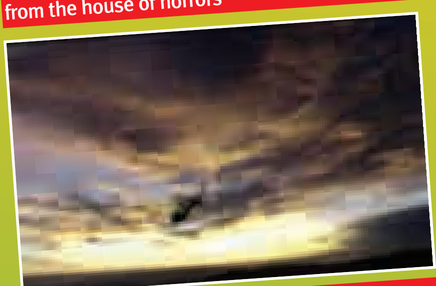
Chris takes aim and fires a missile-shaped can of whoop-ass at the Tyrant. He then escapes in the chopper before the whole place erupts



As they take to the skies, Chris and Jill decide to get cosy in what could be the most unconvincing helicopter set ever produced



And because he's such a goddamn hero, Chris even managed to rescue Rebecca Chambers from the house of horrors



With the Tyrant laid to rest, our fearless threesome head off into the sunset. Who knows, maybe we'll see them again soon...



This month we relate the amateur dramatics that greet gamers who finish Capcom's Resident Evil. There are several alternative conclusions to the game – here we look at Chris Redfield's best ending